

"HOW STRANGELY KNOWLEDGE COMES TO US":  
THOMAS HARDY AND THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

By  
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I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my friend, John Leavey, for his inexhaustible generosity and his diligent support, and to my close friend, Ali, in gratitude for her love and the brilliance of her imagination.

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This dissertation demonstrates how nineteenth-century British realism is guided by the demand to represent the world of "ordinary life." This demand, which authorizes the realist project and defines the place of literature in relation to the world, is both a formal and a social demand, a call for a just representation of the world and for social responsibility. Only by responding to this demand can realism show that it is responsible and not a product of prejudice or dogma. In addition, although this demand enjoins realism to record only what it discovers in the world of "ordinary life," it also sanctions realism's discovery of a universal or general truth within the diverse experiences composing the world of "ordinary life." The desire for universal truth, however, is compromised by the



necessity to represent the demand that gives rise to realism. In other words, this demand is not only the cause of realism but also the effect of realism, something realism itself represents as demanding.

Part 1 explores how some nineteenth-century writers and twentieth-century critics respond to and read the demands of realism. A crisis of representation, I argue, motivates realists to view their project as demanding. Although realists feel compelled to represent the world of "ordinary life," they also contend that any representation of reality is conditional. Despite the conditional nature of their representations, realists do not question the foundation of their project--the demand of realism. In fact, it becomes necessary to integrate the question of the formal into the question of the moral. The nature of the language of realism then appears as the medium of morality.

Part 2 considers how Thomas Hardy in particular responds to this crisis. Hardy proposes that the crisis of representation can be suspended in the setting of the interview, where two parties can meet face-to-face to sort out the truth from a host of misrepresentations. The interview, however, fails to function as a sanctuary. In order to counter this failure, Hardy proposes that two strategies are necessary to respond to the demand: a sincere and conscientious representation and a reflective reader.

PART 1

THE DEMANDS OF REALISM

## INTRODUCTION

Before judgment occurs, the process of  
assimilation must already have taken place.  
--Nietzsche, The Will to Power 289

When realism vaulted the world of ordinary life to its preeminence, this life inspired tremors of wonder in its literary cartographers as it was made to disclose the extraordinary features of its landscape. No longer presupposed as the background of activity, ordinary life seemed to call out for inspection, to enjoin realists to take it into their view. Proposed by many as the ground of activity, ordinary life itself, however, in realism was in need of a ground. The truth of ordinary life for which realism was searching was not simply rediscovered in some unforeseen place. Rather, the topography of this truth was undergoing a thorough reconfiguration. New voices were beginning to be heard, for instance, from hitherto unacknowledged pockets of society. Exceptional cases became the rule. In all of this, realism, as it was understood by many Victorian writers, aspired to an unprecedented sense of transcendence, one very different, however, from the romantic idealizations against which realism is often set. For one thing, while tethered to a quasi-empirical



representation of the world, realism would claim for itself a basis in a sociology or psychology of the "individual," a figure that could at once illustrate the most ordinary and extraordinary, the most universal and yet most idiomatic qualities. Meanwhile, social and literary conventions principally derived from traditional models of authority practically lost their circulating power. Even when there seemed to be a growing fascination with the particularization of experience, even when widespread anxiety at the excess of significant detail replaced this fascination, even when this social chorus seemed to splinter into a terrific din that signified at once mobility and prostration, even when realist writers perceived the historical changes taking place around them as a crisis or a loss of order--there remained the imperative to seek out the truth of ordinary life and respond to its enjoinder. Be true to the truth of ordinary life, be responsible to this truth, says the imperative, for truth demands it.

No doubt much of this has been said already. In fact, an almost random search of contemporary criticism on realism would likely reveal that contemporary critics tend to define realism in terms of a crisis and a demand, or some comparable moral or ethical scheme. These defining terms recall the ways nineteenth-century writers define realism, as if to say this critical language has been bequeathed to contemporary critics by nineteenth-century writers. But as

some characters in Austen's Sense and Sensibility quickly learn when they must execute the terms of an inheritance, one's goods are not always one's own. Likewise, one might say contemporary critics are less in possession of an explanation of realism than they believe as long as they adhere to the terms of this inherited language. Rather than possessing these terms, contemporary critics are possessed by them; indeed, they are their appointed custodians. All of this takes on added importance due to the self-conscious or self-critical sophistication contemporary critics impute to nineteenth-century writers. For contemporary critics and nineteenth-century writers alike tend to leave unexamined the defining terms of realism despite all their supposed self-consciousness about them. If the terms and gestures that coalesce in the demand of realism remain unexamined, they will continue to exercise an almost sacred authority over critics. In other words, these terms and gestures, relations and definitions, will seem demanding and invariable.

The argument presented in Part 1 contains three sections. I begin by examining how 19th-century realists perceive themselves as working within a crisis of representation. This perception is based on the recognition that the existing forms of representing their world are incapable of responding to the social changes underway in their world. Although realists will strive to replace these

obsolete forms with ones more responsive to their world and its exigencies, the crisis of representation that envelopes them cannot be overcome, since realists will regard the new forms of representation as temporary, limited.

Realists, however, will conceive of a way to transcend this crisis of representation. They will regard their project--responding to the exigencies of their world--as necessary and demanding. In this way, realists can justify their representations of ordinary life while maintaining that their representations remain within the crisis. What supposedly constitutes a limitation to realist representations, i.e., the crisis, serves as the foundation for the very mode it appears to obstruct. Realists imagine this crisis, I argue, in order to lend their representations the appearance of being necessary, moral, and responsible. For realists will assert that they are merely responding to a necessity, rather than simply replacing one aesthetic order with another or one set of conventions with another. They are responding to a moral as well as a literary demand. Willfulness evaporates before the demands of necessity and responsibility, the responsibility to represent their world in an unbiased manner. Moral responsibility, then, becomes a criterion of authorship. In short, the perception of a crisis of representation gives rise to the necessity of becoming a responsible writer. Consequently, even while realists declare that their representations cannot overcome

the crisis of representation, the value and authority they attribute to morality and responsibility, to responding to the demand to represent their world, transform their representations into expressions of a necessary and demanding truth. These demands and necessities, I argue, are the effects of realism and not its causes.

In order to make their representations binding, realists will argue that truth and morality dictate realism's aesthetic innovations. Without this moral component, realism's formal innovations might be incorrectly judged as purely an aesthetic matter rather than an ineluctable expression of a demanding truth. To have it otherwise would render realism's truth and formal innovations dependent on the vicissitudes of subjectivity. Realism, I argue, will claim that its innovations are formally neutral. This neutrality will allow these formal innovations to appear transcendent and simultaneously self-evident. Therefore, there is no excuse for refusing or disputing the demands of realism and the truth it discovers. In addition, since these formal innovations constitute a response to a demanding truth, realists will be able to argue that they are merely deferring to an ineluctable representation, a representation that forbids rejection, a representation that is morally binding. Hence, I argue that any opposition to these formal innovations will be construed as an affront to morality and to a necessary and demanding



representation. Any opposing representation of reality will be interpreted as defective, flawed. As a result, a writer's responsibility to the representation of his or her world can never be refused, for to write about one's world in the language of realism means writing a demanding truth.

In the third part of my argument, I examine how Hayden White reads the demands of narration in historiography. White contends that historiographical writings are motivated by a desire to impose narrative coherence on the reality they represent. Like realist writers, historiographers claim that their historical narratives respond to a demand and a crisis. For White, being alert to this language of necessity enables one to examine the desires that underwrite the discourse of a discipline and to criticize its belief in the existence of a proper mode for representing events. In short, White's essay, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," sets out to demystify the strategies of appropriation and the appeals to propriety that create the illusion that what one is narrating is necessary and morally demanding. White's essay is significant for another reason. It warns one of the dangers in seeking a simple solution to the question of a demanding representation. White's cautions notwithstanding, I argue that the question of morality continues to appear as an ideal in his essay.

CHAPTER 1  
CRISIS AND THE DEMANDS OF REALISM

Order is then denounced within order.  
--Jacques Derrida, "Cogito and the History of  
Madness" 35

Dissatisfied with some of the prevailing but critically shortsighted definitions of 19th-century realism circulating in the late 1970s, Jonathan Arac sought to expand this labile notion of representation by suggesting a definition of realism that would acknowledge the self-critical sophistication of the authors of the period and the social significance and the specific cultural interests and desires that are said to be the cachet of realism. Writing in his Commissioned Spirits about Dickens's career, Arac states that in his study of Our Mutual Friend and Martin Chuzzlewit, realism will mean "two things primarily--the author's wish to specify comprehensively the major concerns of his age and the author's critical recognition that there are no literary modes wholly adequate to the task."<sup>1</sup> Realism, for Arac, responds to changed social relationships and pressures requiring the invention of a mode of writing that is suitable to the task of expressing these social changes. Yet realism also recognizes that this mode of writing actively participates in the construction of the



reality it means to represent. But while "old perceptual or organizational techniques and modes" were replaced, the new forms were perceived to be no more "permanent" than their precursors (CS 65). Hence, realism was beset with an epistemological and aesthetic dilemma:

In realism, the imagination is always at a crisis, passing judgment on the inadequacy of old forms for the urgencies of the moment. . . . Within this crisis of rejection, however, there is also "the imagination's new beginning," in which the realist must in his turn say yes, it is good, to the new ordering that has given its shape, its possibility of closure and of fixity, to the work offered to that demanding moment. (66)

This rich and complex definition of realism merits careful inspection because, while Arac sets out to analyze the procedures that determine the forms according to which significance is regulated, the defining terms of realism lie unexamined. Arac's emphasis on realism's capacity to create the possibility of order in a work, "its possibility of closure, of fixity," corresponds with the definition of realism one finds in a long line of literary critics. Arac and others, such as Leo Bersani, Tony Tanner, Susan Stewart, and Fredric Jameson, to name a few, understand the function of realism in terms of strategies for establishing order and coherence, as "strategies of containment," to borrow Fredric Jameson's phrase. Arac himself refers to realism's order-making demands as an effort to "'contain' new forces" (9): "To achieve and define its external relations, its place in the world, literature had to undergo much internal

reorientation. . . . It had to make new forms in order to contain the mobility of its age in a new totality" (9). For Arac this practice of containment is not characterized by repression; it does not manifest itself as a force of negation and prohibition. Instead, Arac's sense of containment is apparently indebted to Foucault, particularly to Foucault's analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge as a positive value, as a force of production rather than one of prohibition.<sup>2</sup>

Yet this definition poses problems, too, especially the problem of a continued, uncritical adherence to the terms and values honored by nineteenth-century writers in their conception of realism. Through this problem, as it comes to light in Arac's work, we can see how twentieth-century critics of Victorian realism fail to consider the fact that realism is justified according to an idealization like "demand," and that this failure leads to the assumption that a line can be drawn to limit an analysis of realism to a determined place without questioning the motivation for this assumption and its effects and, more important, how the fulfillment of this assumption depends on the repression of forces of resistance.

According to Arac, when striving for a "new totality," realists introduce new narrative techniques, the foremost of these being what he calls the "spirit of overview." Locating an analogical source for this narrative technique

of overview in "the new techniques of inspection and centralization worked out by a growing interventionist bureaucracy," Arac contends that the techniques of overview work toward the formation of a totalizing perspective. They serve as the means for achieving a "newly comprehensive 'understanding'" (9), while they strangely appeared as the effect of this comprehensive understanding as well. "It mobilized new powers" of perception and of knowledge that "gave [the writers of the period] a grasp on the new content of their society" (9). Subjects like crime, poverty, the city, epidemic diseases, revolution, and the railroad were regarded as some of "the major forms of disorder from which the age made new knowledge in the service of the new order" (9).<sup>3</sup> This was an "epoch of expansion," wrote Matthew Arnold.<sup>4</sup> Once defined as a threat to social cohesiveness and disruptive of communication, now these forms were adapted to speak a new language by virtue of the practices of intervention and containment. Once these forms of disorder were portentous and, more important, irreducible to previously standing modes of perception and organization; why else would they mobilize a wave of forces to mollify and transform their disruptiveness into a serviceable body of knowledge? In other words, "the production of knowledge from the observation of disorder and disruption . . . [involved] transforming the disorder into the basis for a newly conceived order" (17). If these forms of disorder in

the past inspired an apoplexy of fear, now they were the newly invented objects of a nascent discourse. The argument is that their initial distance and difference demanded neutralization, or circumspection, by a "newly comprehensive 'understanding.'"

Hitherto I have portrayed Arac's conception of the figure of the realist writer in relation to "understanding" and "perception," which are epistemological categories. But the argument goes further. Realist writers as "seers" are also morally inclined to the "spirit of overview" and to the work of a "totalizing understanding" of the world and culture. This commitment spurs them to envision in their narratives the image of an integrated society. "In a given historical moment writers undertaking moral responsibility for their time will share techniques of presentation, patterns of plot, and structures of language that in their interrelationships define a mode of writing" (118).

This moral emphasis might seem to modify Arac's initial definition of realism, but if we return to this definition, we find that Arac even there already apprizes us of a complementary relationship between narrative techniques and moral responsibility. "In realism," he writes, "the imagination is always at a crisis, passing judgment on the inadequacy of old forms for the urgencies of the moment" (65). And in the following page, "within this crisis of rejection . . . in which the realist may say yes, it is



good, . . . to the work offered to the demanding moment" (66). "Crisis," "judgment," "urgencies," "must," "demanding," and "good" are all morally weighted terms. In Arac's definition of realism, these kindred terms refer to both formal, literary relations and ethical, social relations. This relationship represents the distinguishing trait and the trait of distinction of realism. Put rather succinctly, what adjures the invention of realism (that is, what presides over the literary text from the outside) appears woven into the fabric of the narrative as a distinguishing trait of its composition. In other words, the literary and the social relations of a historical period are identified by the same gestures and terms.

"Crisis," for instance, refers to a crisis of the imagination and a "crisis of rejection" out of which the realist writer marshals new forms of order. Then again, "crisis" underscores what is taking place in society in a specific historical moment, along with referring to the transition from old to new orderings of social and institutional relations. As a figure of knowledge endowed with moral purpose, the realist's literary and social objectives consist of overcoming these different forms of crisis in one swift, comprehensive stroke: "the realist must in his turn say yes, it is good, to the new ordering." If what is demanded of a realist writer is a certain kind of narrative, a "new ordering that has given its shape, its

possibility of closure, of fixity," this narrative order must also be "good." A "totalizing understanding" resulting from the "spirit of overview" attenuates "the urgencies of the moment."

Furthermore, the innovative techniques that realism uses would appear to be rationalized, invested with a foundational status, by having as their unquestionable provenance a moral labor. "Undertaking moral responsibility for their time" is a criterion of authorship. Hence, one finds that many of the period's authors, in defending themselves from attacks that their works were morally destitute, affirm the necessity of their writing on the grounds that they were merely responding (and responsible) to the demands of Truth or Reality, as opposed to the lesser conventions of decorum. As Charlotte Bronte describes conventionality and morality in the Preface to Jane Eyre: "Men too often confuse them: they should not be confounded: appearance should not be mistaken for truth; narrow human doctrines, that only tend to elate and magnify a few, should not be substituted for the world-redeeming creed of Christ. There is--I repeat it--a difference; and it is a good, and not a bad action to mark broadly and clearly the line of separation between them" (1). Some years after this preface was written, Thomas Hardy would also be compelled to defend his writing from nearly identical allegations. And like Charlotte Bronte, Hardy would turn to a rhetoric of



necessity to invalidate these allegations. Truth and Reality became the agents of his writing, as they did for Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Anne Bronte, Charles Dickens, John Stuart Mill and others.<sup>5</sup>

When Hardy wrote in an Apology, "[I] cannot help it,"<sup>6</sup> he established a program/device for redeeming the content of his verses from obloquy. Here, willfulness evaporates before the demands of responsibility and necessity. A question of what is "good," hence, authorizes the quest for a proper mode of writing.

And yet whence does this moral injunction originate? By whom or what is it authorized? Is there, in other words, a subject, a substance, or a cause to this injunction? Does it authorize itself? Furthermore, what explains the intersection between the question of a demand and the idea (or rhetoric) of a literary and social crisis? Do these questions perpetuate the terms and gestures of an interventionist program and the correlative strategies of containment that Arac uses to define realism as a closed totality? Moreover, how is this demand to be responsible to one's age maintained in writing if realists are self-critical of their own ability to achieve a reliable and enduring sense of order? In other words, the order of the demand binds them to responsibility, but the means of their fidelity, writing, is irresponsible--arbitrary, unreliable, nonbinding, untrustworthy. Can one be both responsible and

irresponsible? Questions such as these, I will argue later, complicate the desire to set the "place of literature" "in the world," to borrow Arac's terminology. For if the significance of responsibility becomes a way of marking the limit between "an age" or "a world" and literature (specifically realism), how is the integrity of this limit to be preserved when the means of doing so are acknowledged to be necessarily irresponsible? In order to designate the place of literature, writing, one depends on the creation of a boundary that divides and relates the external world and the internal world of literature. To be a responsible writer means being responsible to events in "the world"; hence, this relation, that is, relating as such, takes place through writing responsibly. But because the techniques that belong to realism are described as necessarily irresponsible, the means of fulfilling one's responsibility to the world breaks down, and with it relation as such. Prevented from establishing a responsible relation with the world, the place of literature cannot be designated, since the place of literature unfolds, in Arac's argument, in a determined response to the world.

In Arac's argument, the notion of crisis perturbs order and the realization of enduring totalities. But Arac seems to posit simultaneously that the crisis against which realism reacts, a crisis that also defines realism, has the status of an unquestionable origin. An outmoded pattern of

order requires revision and reorientation. Because of these revisions, a new vision of the world appears along with new methods of defining, classifying, regulating, sanctioning, or differentiating the subjects and the objects in this world. But something must transcend these revisions, something inscrutable that yet makes comprehension and realism possible. Something, in other words, sanctions these revisions and calls them "good" and "ordered," and thus speaks with the force of a transcendent authority. This authority, which speaks without speaking, speaks loudest because it need not speak at all, is the "demand" that defines realism for Arac and so many other critics.

#### The Demand of Realism and Truth

A great deal of the tension realists face results from the fact that, despite the ingenuity of their new sense of order, the crisis is never fully superseded. Consequently, to rise to the level of the self-critical writer necessitates a recognition of the evanescence of their own privileged orderings. Such writers "must recognize their own enterprises as tentative": "the new form then made will be no more permanent than was the old form." It is as if the writers' self-critical responsibility led them to conclude what Nietzsche was led to conclude in his own thinking regarding the subject of "unities." "We need 'unities,'" writes Nietzsche, "in order to be able to

reckon: that does not mean we must suppose that such unities exist" (WP 338). The comparison, however, would cease there. Nietzsche, on the one hand, would have explained the desire for unities as symptomatic of a will for an enabling fiction motivated by interests of self-preservation and a will to power, interests projected onto the world as predicates of existence. The realists, on the other hand, would have explained their desire for totalizing understandings as a necessary response to a crisis. As the preface from Jane Eyre and Hardy's Apology indicate, they would not recognize their understandings as willful interpretations, and so would turn away from issues of conflict, difference, opposition, and alterity. Difference would be "blamed" "as wrongful confusion!" (Derrida, "Living On" 84). Anything that contrasts with the terms of this crisis matrix fades from recognition. While the methods resolving the crisis at hand would be regarded as mutable, susceptible of adjustment and revision, the status of the foundation, of the crisis as such, would remain unquestioned.

Without this crisis, the demand of literary and social responsibility would not exist. Without this interpretation of disorder, mobility, and jeopardized knowledge and perception, self-criticism could not in the end reclaim for itself a certain commission of mastery.



Ever asserting itself, this crisis is also unquestionable because it is the putative background of activity--a historical assumption. Unlike the other malleable forms of social life that change in significance as they are reprocessed and their functions reformulated according to new discourses of knowledge, the sense of "crisis," like the assumption of a demand, seems to be the one form of social life that remains an undifferentiated object of knowledge. As the transition from "outmoded" forms of perception and organization to new ones begins to transform and reinterpret the significance of social forms to accommodate them to more current notions of society and more pragmatic interpretations, the unchallenged perception of a "crisis" perdures as the one object of knowledge not affected by the activity that continuously adjusts, revises, and replaces the significance of a thing. Crisis is fundamental, and therefore an unlikely candidate to lose its privileged meaning. Its status could be described as ironic or, as Derrida has written in "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," as the origin of a structure that is itself not part of a structure.

As center, it is the point at which the substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible. At the center, the permutation or the transformation of elements (which of course may be structures enclosed within a structure) is forbidden. . . . Thus it has always been thought that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. This is why classical thought

concerning structure could say that the center was, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it. The center is at the center of the totality, and yet, since the center does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality) the totality has its center elsewhere. The center is not the center. . . . The concept of centered structure is in fact the concept of a play based on a fundamental ground, a play constituted on the basis of a fundamental immobility and a reassuring certitude which itself is beyond the reach of play. (279)

For just this reason, we need to question the demand of realism, in both senses of this phrase: the demand that is defined as an intrinsic quality of realist aesthetics and the demand that supposedly gives rise to realism as what justifies its development. We must examine how this demand is represented as a seemingly unquestionable origin, an origin of realistic aesthetics that is, however, undisturbed despite the ongoing pressures against satisfying this demand that emanate from its own means of representation.

Because the realists are self-critical of new orderings, Arac surmises that they ultimately "must recognize their own enterprises as tentative" (emphasis added). J. S. Mill, too, wrote something to this effect, though not in reference to realist writers. "There is no such thing as absolute certainty, but there is assurance sufficient for the purposes of human life. We may, and must, assume our opinion to be true for the guidance of our own conduct."<sup>7</sup> Arac's conclusion is significant, in particular because it stops short of studying the way tentativeness may contribute to the interventionist program



of realism and how this kind of conclusiveness repeats the realist gesture.

Arac's conclusion rests on the certitude of a logical necessity. One can state this in the following way: because X is the case, then Y "must" follow. But is Arac's argument illustrating a logical or historical necessity? In either case, the imperative "must" states that "this should happen, or this should have happened." Even if one reflected on the historical necessity of these consequences, the emphasis placed on the necessity of a determinate outcome does not eliminate the problems that surface with this description, for this deference to history continues to operate with normalizing insistence. As a result, one might say that by invoking an imperative to describe a historical event(uality) or a discursive practice, Arac submits his analysis to the form of the demand that articulates the figure of authorship and the "place of literature."

One could say that Arac here simply recovers the process of reasoning that Victorian writers themselves very likely observed. This recovery raises questions, though, especially whether Arac's recovery of this process of reasoning leads him to reenact in his own writing, albeit with a difference, a facet of his object of study.<sup>8</sup> By insisting on the inevitability of this process of reasoning in Victorian aesthetics, Arac's argument may be idealizing the process, reflecting on it as a formal or logical dilemma

rather than a strategic contingency. One of the results of this idealization is that the structure of the demand survives intact, and that the relationships and distinctions with which it coincides retain their hold. The terms sanctioned by this apparatus will then appear fixed. A reading that adheres to these limits extends the force of the field in question and the priority of the terms along which this field is articulated.

Arac's conclusion about realist modes of representation predicts a fateful condition in realist discourse: this almost privative discourse is tentative, impermanent, irresponsible, and groundless. It attests, in other words, to certain limits of representation. Even though the realists may say "yes" to their new orderings, they must recognize the qualitative limit within these new orderings. But rather than relegate oneself to the other side of knowledge, a self-critical posture enables Arac's realists to transform a scene of crisis and of stultification into a victory of sorts, since, like Marlow in Heart of Darkness, they "[have] been permitted to draw back [a] hesitating foot" (113). Arac overlooks the rhetorical effect of this limitation within realist discourse, overlooks how this supposed limitation serves as the foundation for the very mode of representation that it seems to obstruct. One might then begin to question how this limit could be employed to extend the scope of the strategies of containment in realism

by continually expanding the range, objects, and subjects of its containment. The limit could always be redrawn. Confusion, crisis, and disorder do not refer necessarily to a historical given; instead, they function as a pretext for realist representations--pretext, not pre-text.

One, for instance, can examine the way these intolerable limitations can harbor a different, more constructive function by considering how J. S. Mill contends in his own work with limitations of this ilk. There is, in other words, a value to such a representation where certainty has no moorings. As Nietzsche wrote in The Will to Power, "The question of values is more fundamental than the question of certainty: the latter becomes serious only by presupposing that the value question has already been answered" (322). In Mill's On Liberty, the presumably debilitating qualities of impermanence and tentativeness are transformed into constructive functions with a definable purpose. For Mill, these conditions are ineluctable and ubiquitous, saturating issues of politics, religion, morality, judgment, opinion, and authority. They suffuse "the business of life" (98). Because these qualities imbue almost every state of social life, absolute certainty is decerpted out of this life. One need only turn to On Liberty, however, and especially chapter II, "Of the Liberty of Thought and Discussion," to observe how Mill finds that the conditions of impermanence and tentativeness allow

people, provided that they are "systematically trained" (107) to walk in a disciplined manner, to step toward "a living truth" (97). These qualities do not enervate the reign of truth; they accomplish it.

Consider the following passage.

The beliefs which we have most warrant for have no safeguard to rest on but a standing invitation to the whole world to prove them unfounded. If the challenge is not accepted, or is accepted and the attempt fails, we are far enough from certainty still, but we have done the best that the existing state of human reason admits of: we have neglected nothing that could give the truth a chance of reaching us; if the lists are kept open, we may hope that, if there be a better truth, it will be found when the human mind is capable of receiving it; and in the meantime we may rely on having attained such approach to truth as is possible in our own day. This is the amount of certainty attainable by a fallible being, and this the sole way of attaining it. (81)

Mill can find comfort in the curtailment of absolute certainties because he can affirm that any misfortune, any error, even any crisis, will represent a calculated moment in the approach to truth for a "trained" person. Revision, refinement, and improvement nurture the process of approaching this truth, even if the truth is ultimately confined to the process itself. "Even progress, which ought to superadd, for the most part only substitutes one partial and incomplete truth for another" (109).

Although truth is indefinitely deferred, projected apocalyptically into a future moment to come that Mill can only herald at his time, the rational method of inquiry Mill advocates in the pursuit of truth is always enmeshed in the



act of responding to this truth--he receives its long distance call. Just as Arac's realists are guided in their representations of ordinary life by a notion of "good" and by the enjoinder to be responsible in one's response to realism's demands, the condition of uncertainty that seems to imperil truth cannot deter one from acting responsibly in Mill's scheme. As Mill states: "we have done the best" we can to enhance the attainment of certainty; furthermore, "we have neglected nothing that could give the truth a chance of reaching us" (emphasis added). Knowledge and truth are, therefore, matters of discipline, of comporting oneself responsibly by being comprehensive and disdaining carelessly shortsighted representations of truth. Responsibility is the watchword of truth. Thus, any other representation of truth must be irresponsible. It remains shortsighted or unconscious of its limited purview and remiss about its convictions to truth. In Mill's conception of truth the twofold appeal to comprehensiveness and to self-consciousness (for a thoroughly comprehensive view also instructs one to learn "the grounds of one's own opinion" [97]), affords one the means of transcending the shortsightedness that typifies other representations. Even if one is, for the moment, irreversibly wandering within a circuit of uncertainty, one's representation of truth can comprehend all others and, therefore, overcome their shortcomings on the way to a more (and morally) satisfactory

representation. For Matthew Arnold, the "harmonizing" effects of "culture" embodied a similar ideality. Here, "ill-calculated" and "ill-regulated" actions and ideas (CA 73, 74) could be rehabilitated under the care of a sweet and light form of therapy.<sup>9</sup> Like Eliot and Arac's realists, Mill's demand for a comprehensive view of truth is liberated from the lamentable fate of "prevailing opinions" (94) and "superstitions" (97) that is the lamentable fate of "fallible beings" because Mill's disciplined pursuit of truth never deteriorates into the sort of representation of "narrow and uncultivated minds" (92) of "common men" (99). Not everyone, it turns out, has access to this conception of truth; it is exclusive and proscriptive, even while it pretends to be incapacitated by limitations and uncertainties. That is, even while Mill portrays this conception of truth as lacking permanent boundaries, it always operates within prescribed boundaries that limit its conditions of appearance and its accessibility. This is also the situation with the demand that sanctions realism and that justifies its unruly representations as "good" because one writes responsibly.

On the one hand, then, the uncertainty that surrounds the question of truth may be construed as an obstacle to its acquisition. On the other hand, it is precisely because of this uncertainty and because of the surfeit of possible representations of the truth that Mill, and Arac's realists,



must invent terms like morality, responsibility, and discipline to create the need for and the effect of credibility that will distinguish Mill's conception from the desultory conception that characterizes competing representations. Here, the very discourse of truth and knowledge is the focus of a struggle even while Mill seems to have dispensed with it. Without this conception of truth as an uncertain and tentative subject, the need for discipline and responsibility would never have been recognized, let alone exalted. Without this conception of truth, the trait of self-consciousness that Arac attributes to realist writers would not have been invested with so much value, nor would its correlate that writers who are not self-conscious about their representations simply continue to produce unconsciously delusive forms of certainty that, moreover, hinder them from being responsible. For this reason, the acquisition of truth becomes--or better, is made--a troublesome event. Truth becomes a problem in order to institute the necessity for a program of discipline and responsibility that will be, as Mill states, "the sole way of attaining [the truth]." One learns, in other words, the value of responsibility and discipline in confronting the limitations to truth, the absence of certainties, and the provisional status of unities.

### Notes

1. Commissioned Spirits: The Shaping of Social Motion in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville, and Hawthorne, 65. Subsequent references will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation CS.
2. See Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, chapters 6 and 7.
3. Such a designation ("disorder") is part of, answers to the demand that sets it--the designation--in play.
4. Culture and Anarchy, 83. Subsequent references will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation CA.
5. See Daniel Cottom's Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation.
6. Thomas Hardy: The Complete Poems, 559. Subsequent references will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation CP.
7. On Liberty, 79. Subsequent references will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation OL.
8. On this subject as it pertains to historical research, see Dominick LaCapra's "History and Psychoanalysis" in Soundings in Critical Theory. "I would like to stress an equally important but often unnoticed sense in which transference is at play in history, that is, in the very relation of the historian to the 'object' of study. Transference in this somewhat more indirect and attenuated sense refers to the manner in which the problems at issue in the object of study reappear (or are repeated with variations) in the work of the historian" (37).
9. This conception of truth is also not unlike the one that Cottom finds dictating the style and epistemology of George Eliot's writing. "The style of her writing had to be deliberately inserted among a host of alternative representations so that its status as a representation could be marked, defined, and given the appearance of greater comprehensiveness. . . . This is the epistemology characteristic of the liberal intellectual: the conviction that knowledge is refined to the extent that the discourse with which it is advanced is able to comprehend variant and competing ideas. . . . In this situation, the question of whether an argument might be true or false is practically beside the point. The point is to produce a discourse that

does not seem to exclude from itself the competition of other perspectives but rather seems to see through or beyond the others" (70).

## CHAPTER 2 THE MORAL AND THE FORMAL

We had forgotten that some greatness, like some goodness, wants to be beheld only from a distance and by all means only from below, not from above; otherwise it makes no impression.

--Nietzsche, The Gay Science 15

If this moment of comprehending the truth of truth, the truth that truth is limited and discipline is required to comprehend this point, is to jettison itself of the historical differences that mark this privileged representation as an arbitrary program of exclusivity, truth must be made to appear transcendent. Mill himself recognized that without this transfiguration, one would be simply submitting to some form of authority rather than positioning oneself to "receive" the truth. To pursue a different course would almost be, as Arnold argued, "trying to do violence to nature instead of working along with it" (CA 85). As the passage from On Liberty details, a person's orientation to truth must be almost a sign of passivity, despite all the energy that is expended in challenging and repelling challenges to one truth or another on the path to a more refined sense of truth. One takes great pains to insure that truth has "a chance of reaching us," that "it will be found when the human mind is capable of receiving



it." Truth is, therefore, something to be discovered, something that comes to a person rather than an invention of that person. Its own justification is that it exists and that it awaits to be recovered when the proper methods for its discovery are themselves discovered. In other words, the debate over the representation of truth will turn on formal and methodological questions, as if to say that these questions are spared the often irrational and pugnacious machinations that are often part and parcel of the way truth is institutionalized, authorized, imposed, or incubated. Truth as transcendent is, Mill implies, something that holds a person, not something that a person holds true.

The purpose of chapter two is to examine the collusion between realism and the moral imperative that frames the representation of ordinary life. In particular, I will consider further how a particular formulation of realism must be accorded a transcendental value equivalent to a necessity in order to guarantee its authority over competing representations--in fact, over representation in general. The transcendental value attributed to the demand of realism will nurture a strategy of neutrality and exclusion; it will operate as the measure of truth endowed with the imprimatur of some universal charter.

Over the years, the relationship between realistic narrative techniques and a system of moral judgments has received great scrutiny from critics of all orientations.

From feminist, psychoanalytic, historical, rhetorical, philosophical, literary, and anthropological circles, critics have demonstrated that realistic narratives, and often narratives in general, have collaborated with morally determined codes of propriety and categories of evaluation to naturalize prescriptive values by identifying the site of their authority and origin in nature or reality. Because these values will be identified with the nature of things, these prescriptive values will avoid being recognized as such. Instead, these values will be discovered woven into the texture of reality itself as something intrinsic to its nature, something a realist needs only to describe in a representation of ordinary life.

While one could say that the literary conventions defining the concept of vraisemblance (or verisimilitude) differ from those comprising realism, the concept of verisimilitude harbors an appeal to a standard of measurement similar to one in realism that warrants consideration. This comparison may suggest something about the composition of the demands of realism.

Peggy Kamuf is one who has written on the subject of verisimilitude. For Kamuf, a recourse to this term initiates a program of interpretation that, in its concern to discover and ratify the authenticity of a representation, applies itself to finding some form of intentionality (in culture, an author, or literary conventions) to which one

can refer in order to attach a text to an originary value or position. She has analyzed a "paradoxical" logic constituting and deconstituting the ground of verisimilitude in the "real," that is, in a historical and material stratum.

For Kamuf, verisimilitude is goal oriented. It has a teleological design, a logical structure and a moral determination.

As a "vision of the world," verisimilitude provides a standard for logical judgments--probability. As a "system of values," verisimilitude catalogues a social group's ethical judgments, its ideology. But as the two can never be rigorously divorced from each other, it follows that what a particular society judges to be logical or probable is always bound up with a prior determination of what is deemed proper.  
(292)

Verisimilitude makes possible a selective organization, distribution, and maintenance of "historical reality" according to the measurements of probability and moral judgment. As a result, Kamuf can say that verisimilitude is not in the least concerned with representing "historical reality." "Historical reality is not the model for vraisemblance. On the contrary, vraisemblance is that code according to which a society imposes an ideological order on historical, material reality" (292). Verisimilitude tells the history of "history;" it tells how "history" is ideologically formed as a logical and moral order bent on the eventual rationalization of life from the outside, from a privileged position of transcendence out of which it is

converted into history. Prescriptive statements dissimulate descriptive ones; sectarian interests obtain general validity in a synecdochic transference of values caring for the good of the whole society. Or again, as Kamuf states it, verisimilitude separates "historical or singular reality from general or essential truth" (292). This separation gives transcendental authority and neutrality to the order of propriety that verisimilitude invokes to correlate with its vision of the world.

What this detour through verisimilitude may suggest is that the realist sense of "crisis" presents history as "history." "It supposes," as Kamuf writes in her essay, which is obviously indebted to the work of Jacques Derrida, "that a system of differential values (for example, language or culture) was set in operation by a non-differential term, that is, an origin uncontaminated by the differential structure it inaugurates" (297). A moral and logical standard is precisely the gauge of mimetic truth on which George Eliot and George Henry Lewes rely to determine the referential accuracy of realist literature. Eliot's impatience with bumptious, immature, and "drivelling" writers throughout her essay, "Silly Novels By Lady Novelists," is often inspired by the failure of these writers to reflect on whether the behavior and speech of a character has any probable foundation in the behavior and



speech of a figure in reality to which a consensus can refer for comparison.

That probable likenesses and normative expectations form the structure of verisimilitude become even clearer in Lewes's essay on realism, "Realism and Idealism," which is notable for its rejection of the premise that idealism is the antithesis to realism. He writes,

Art always aims at the representation of Reality, i.e. of Truth. . . . Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism, but Falsism. . . . To misrepresent the forms of ordinary life is no less an offence than to misrepresent the forms of ideal life. (87)

For our purposes, it is most important to point out that Lewes denounces any improbable rendering of Reality as a "defect," a prevarication. "[E]very departure from truth in motive, idiom, or probability, is, to that extent, a defect" (89). Out of this contention, Lewes's essay exhorts the reader more than once to follow his counsels in an effort to forfend against this sort of corruption of truth. This counsel advises the reader to avoid these defects because they do an injustice to truth, to reality. This counsel will be grammatically identified with an imperative. And as Kamuf's argument indicates, this imperative veils a moral, normative injunction as its decisive index of mimetic veracity--that is, of truth, reality, and verisimilitude. Lewes argues that the "highest" (88) and truest representation of reality demands that there be in reality a direct complement to this representation to which a

consensus can refer as a standard of comparison. Yet in order to block any resistance to its dictums, it must conceal its origins as a nonneutral or differential value if it is to function convincingly and demandingly as an uncontested measure of truth.

According to the terms of this logic of a demanding truth, a "consensus" could never be posted as a legitimate site of its authority. Instead, the strength of a demanding truth resides partially in its ascension to some sanctuary beyond the vicissitudes of history from which it delivers its proclamations in a peremptory fashion. Perhaps the finest achievement of this authority is that it must not impress itself on someone as a form of authority, rather as a necessity or a self-evident assumption. The representation of this truth must commend itself. It must always appear, in other words, that truth itself dictates these aesthetic requirements and any moral principle that will be aligned with it. Writers do not pursue truth; truth pursues a writer. To have it otherwise would render truth and knowledge dependent on the idiosyncracies and limitations of subjectivity, rather than foreground it as the condition of subjectivity (knowledge and sympathies). As Lewes writes, "The novelist . . . expresses his mind in his novels. . . . [But his subject] must always be real--true" (89). Lewes is clear on this point elsewhere. "If the writer's knowledge or sympathies do not lead him in the

direction of ordinary life, if he can neither paint town nor country, let him take to the wide fields of History or Fancy. Even there the demands of truth will pursue him" (90). To imagine anything else would be an affront to truth. It would amount to endorsing an authority or a representation that would merely be the fruit of prejudice, of some arbitrary authority, of convention, or, in general, of "a simple falsification and bad art" (87). The logic of this demand was, writes Daniel Cottom, "dedicated to a transcendence of all that was arbitrary, violent, and merely traditional or material" (52)

While it is important to notice that Lewes here disqualifies a certain conception of art that differs from his own for being "a simple falsification and bad art," it is equally important to recognize in critical statements like this one the strategic function of the language of morality that is so much a factor in his aesthetics of realism. Without this moral component to his criticism, his critical statements might be incorrectly judged as a purely aesthetic matter rather than as an ineluctable expression of that demanding truth that serves as the subject and ground of his essay. This language of morality grounds his aesthetic statements, which might otherwise appear wholly personal or arbitrary. When Lewes writes, for example, that "a Representation . . . must necessarily be limited by the nature of its medium" (87), whether the medium is canvas,

marble, or language, he explains that these limitations are brought on by the "peculiar laws" and "the necessities imposed on [Art] by each medium of expression," both of which, he writes, "[lie] in the nature of the medium itself" (87). Nothing short of a set of necessary laws, then, must appear to constitute the value, origin, and authority of Lewes's critical framework. For these laws of representation to be absolutely binding, they must display a level of integrity based on nothing but self-evidence. Without this axiomatic value, the truth of ordinary life would need to be demonstrated as such, and the morality this life was meant to underwrite would be exposed as a rationalization that turns one representation of "ordinary life" into a general truth. As a truth in need of being demonstrated, this truth would no longer be the necessary or inevitable expression of a collective sentiment and a collective conception if its integrity were formulated in different terms, such as: a convention, a doctrine, a rule, or a policy. Despite an aesthetics that adjures to represent the fulsomeness of ordinary life, this truth would no longer be linked to a representation of a life that is essentially neutral in its abandonment of historical differences. Lewes's frequent use of all-inclusive pronouns (the first-person plural "we" and possessive "our") to assert a community of sentiment and conception suggests this abandonment. Who is this "we" who speaks for and in



ordinary life, for whom the representation of "our" life is a seamless unity? Perhaps Elizabeth Gaskell understood better than Lewes that the representation of ordinary life involved a bit of ventriloquism, for, as she admits in her preface to Mary Barton, there are those unfortunates who "pass unregarded" (38) because they just cannot speak for themselves. The possibility of an almost untutored apprehension of this truth, and of the shared conception of ordinary life this truth evokes, must be a given for all spectators in order to create a situation that allows "all who see [to see] a perfect truth" (88). The conception of ordinary life must be as "inevitable" to spectators, to use one of Lewes's terms, as its representation is to realists. One almost has a tautology as a consequence. If you know what this life is, you know it and you will see it. Yet if you do not, you are not a member of the "we" who inhabit that life, who lay claim to its sentiments, and who participate in its conception. Otherwise this truth could not proclaim to be self-evident, inevitable, natural, and untarnished by subjective adaptations of the forms represented in this life. Because the representation of truth is inevitable, one is predisposed, written by this peremptory order of representation. What appears opposed to this representation of ordinary life is unreasonable, unless it is rationalized as the negative side of morality and nature.

Hence, one can understand how aesthetic mandates like these dictate Lewes's diction when he describes the antithesis of realism as "falsism." Because "falsism" means a self-evident lie, the grounds for disqualifying an inaccurate representation of ordinary life must be, according to Lewes, as self-evident and inevitable as the truth of this life. No proof or explanation should be necessary to justify the grounds for excluding a representation of ordinary life as inaccurate beyond, perhaps, identifying it as such. To imply something different would imply, in turn, that this truth is not self-evident and inevitable, that this truth is in fact an arbitrary matter to be demonstrated, disputed, and enforced, also that the "we" in ordinary life is an imaginary unity. Let us not forget, moreover, that this aesthetic evaluation carries a severe moral condemnation. Lewes could have described this strange representation of ordinary life as a mistake in perception, an alternative conception, an accident of ignorance, a topical difference, or a remnant of some traditional scheme. But if his aesthetic laws, and the sentiments and conceptions these laws legislate, are to overcome the shoals of history and consciousness, a transcendent source of authority must be the standard of judgment between realism and its opposite, between a truth and a lie. Naming the opposite of realism a "falsism," a self-evident lie, gives Lewes not only the means of equating

an aesthetic error with a moral one but, more important, of finding support for this moral system in a universal value of truth that purports to disengage itself from the influence of historical differences and contingencies. The underlying assumption here is that morality has no claim to any authority outside itself--it claims its own authority in its seeming transparency. Determining what goes into a "good" representation ought then to be just as clear to readers and writers, which implies that there should be no excuse for misleading representations of ordinary life--for "falsifications" (87).

By identifying an aesthetic order with "the nature of a medium," Lewes identifies his aesthetic laws as formally neutral, since these laws define a condition of representation. Once Lewes insists that the only permissible limitation to the representation of Art, Reality, and Truth originates in these "laws," portrays these "laws" as being founded on the nature of language, and reproaches any departure from truth "except such as inevitably lies in the nature of the medium itself" (87), representation will operate in accordance with the stable rules of a moral grammar. What limits, regulates, and departs from the representation of the truth and reality is simply confined within the nature of the medium. The fact that Lewes leaves representation susceptible to departures and accessible to limitations does nothing to endanger the expression of truth

and reality. On the contrary, representation is strengthened by confining these departures and limitations to a determined space beyond the reach of realist writers, where it cannot be tampered with.

Lewes's framework must both acknowledge the likelihood that errors in the representation of truth and reality will occur and, simultaneously, restrict this occurrence to a specific context of interpretation. In this way, he can interpret any representation of ordinary life that conflicts with his own aesthetic imperatives as an "offence," a "defect," and a "falsification"--a culpable wrong, not a mere difference. Because Lewes's framework acknowledges the possibility of error, as do those of J. S. Mill and Arac, he can regulate this possibility in order to fortify the imperative of truth against transgressions while indenturing writers to his aesthetics. Thus, he forbids alternative representations of ordinary life, since any alternative must appear in opposition to the universal nature of the medium of representation. What departs from and limits representation must be isolated: it must have a narrow range of effects and applicability if the representation of ordinary life is not to be obstructed by the proliferation of conflicting, rather than defective or offensive, conceptions of ordinary life.



Lewes writes, "[N]o departure from truth is permissible, except such as inevitably lies in the nature of the medium" (87); and he adds,

If [the novelist] select[s] the incidents and characters of ordinary life, he must be rigidly bound down to accuracy in the presentation. He is at liberty to avoid such subjects, if he thinks them prosaic and uninteresting (which means that he will not feel their poetry and interest), but having chosen, he is not at liberty to falsify, under pretense of beautifying them; every departure from truth in motive, idiom, or probability, is, to that extent, a defect. (89)

Both passages revolve around the question of departures from truth. However, the two passages ascribe a very different function and significance to the notion of a departure from truth. There is a departure that is permissible, the only one permissible in fact, and then there is a departure described as a "defect." While one might be tempted to argue that the equivocal significance of "departure" amounts to an inconsistency, a contradiction in Lewes's argument, it is more rewarding to reflect on the way this distinction is thoroughly in keeping with the framework of his aesthetic imperatives and formal laws. After all, as Nietzsche wrote in Human, All Too Human, "The irrationality of a thing is no argument against its existence, rather a condition of it" (182).

As long as the only permissible form of departure from truth is associated with "the nature of the medium," a departure will be regulated by the necessary and inevitable laws of a medium that rationalize this departure as a formal

condition of a medium. This form of departure, then, appears to function virtually independently of subjective motivations ("liberty"). This constitutive, virtual danger to a truthful representation of ordinary life bears all the signs of being disarmed from the beginning, because its function is accounted for within the more important work of the representation of truth. Despite this constitutive danger, "Art always aims at the representation of Reality, i.e. of Truth" (87). Thus, Lewes's interpretative machinery protects the truth of ordinary life from competing views of this life by identifying a correct error, a departure grounded on "peculiar laws" within "the nature of the medium," in contradistinction to the wider realm of impermissible errors that have no basis at all except in immoral "falsisms." If the term "departure" signifies the fall of and from truth, the limit of truth, the aim of Lewes's interpretative machinery is to appropriate this limit, this other, in order to master it as a correct error.

Every form of departure is not redeemable because the terms that define the significance of each species of departure are not consistent from case to case. If the two forms of departure ever became synonymous, if Lewes ever found credible or redeemable a form of departure not limited by the "nature of a medium" and its "peculiar laws," he would be admitting that such laws are indeed un-necessary. But more important, he would be admitting that the terms

according to which "departure" take on a significance and function in aesthetic evaluations are contingent, not "inevitable." In other words, the quarrel over aesthetic values would include a search for a specific language to establish the boundaries of representation.

Terms like "defect," "offence," and "falsification" are deployed to censure those untenable and unredeemable forms of departure. Each term signifies a transgression, a demonstration of moral and civil dissolution. That these terms of transgression harbor legal and moral connotations is especially intriguing, for it demonstrates how aesthetic debates are also a matter of morality, institutionalization, and history. In a case like Lewes's aesthetics, the motivation for sheathing such issues within the realm of aesthetics is to dehistoricize them as formal properties constitutive of the "nature of the medium." For instance, while the term "defect" means that something is incomplete, lacking a necessary part, or altering an established form, it can also carry a moral inflection, meaning "a flaw" or "a blemish." Equally important is his statement that "[t]o misrepresent the forms of ordinary life is . . . an offence" (87). Certain representations of truth commit an infraction against the "peculiar laws" composing "the nature of the medium" because they are not like that singular form of departure that fosters the representation of truth, for only this form is said to function always in agreement with a

medium's laws. But if Lewes's only concern in drawing on these terms of transgression is to identify and then rectify an aesthetic infraction, what value could there be in coloring his aesthetic framework with a collection of terms that so boldly denote a moral judgment? The value, of course, is in making aesthetic laws demanding, even necessary. Fusing moral and formal discourses in terms like "offence," "defect," and "falsification" adds a tone of responsibility that would be missing if Lewes's aesthetic decrees merely passed for institutionalized conventions. The demands of representation must not appear as conventionally imposed, but as dutifully articulated. Lewes, then, can refer to purely formal grounds in prohibiting a writer from ignoring the edict to demonstrate an obedience to the representation of truth. Thus, he will write that a writer "is at liberty to avoid" the subject of ordinary life "if he thinks them prosaic and uninteresting" (89).

A writer's responsibility to the representation of ordinary life, therefore, can never be a matter of a refusal, or a disagreement, for to write about ordinary life means writing the universal and necessary truth even if, as one finds in Arac's and Lewes's analysis, the mode of representation will at times conspire to frustrate the fulfillment of a writer's responsibility to this truth.



### CHAPTER 3 THE DEMANDS OF REALISM AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

This inquiry into the complicity between realist narrative techniques and an order of moral judgment has implications beyond the field of literary studies. For instance, Hayden White has labored to dismantle the often furtive appeals that the discourses of history have made to a moral order as a way of establishing their authority. The close relationship between realism and historiography may show that there is something to be gleaned from the manner in which the discipline of history imports a system of moral judgment into its field of operations.

There are several strategic reasons for extending the discussion of the demands of realism by taking an excursion through the field of historiography from White's point of emphasis. More specific reasons follow in the succeeding pages, but for the moment, let me make a few general statements. First, White's explicit object of analysis is the value historians grant to narrativity in historiographical discourses to give real events a structure, "an order of meaning" (9), that would be absent if these events were merely arranged in respect to their

chronology. He writes, "historians . . . have transformed narrativity from a manner of speaking into a paradigm of the form which reality itself displays to a 'realistic' consciousness, . . . the presence of which in a discourse having to do with real events signals at once its objectivity , its seriousness, and its realism" (27). What White learns from his analysis of the structure of narrativity in historiographical writing also figures as an explanation, he argues, of the function of narrativity where imaginary or fictional events are the material of representation. A quick sampling illustrates this: "the very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity" (10); "For in fact every narrative, however seemingly 'full,' is constructed on the basis of a set of events which might have been included but were left out; and this is as true of imaginary as it is of realistic narratives" (14); "narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority" (17). As one can see in these citations, the discussion of fiction is not accidental or secondary to the more important study of historiographical writing; instead, it is always on the

scene. What this brief account demonstrates is that White generalizes his analysis of narrativity to include fictional narratives as well. But what I find particularly helpful in his general discussion of narrativity is his identification of a moralizing impulse as what grounds the value of narrativity. As we found in Arac, Mill, and Lewes's arguments, certain imperatives attempt to govern the activity of representation by stipulating that events be apprehended in reference to a moral framework that alone and necessarily emerges as the peerless trustee of truth or reality. So White argues, "narrativity, certainly in factual storytelling and probably in fictional storytelling as well, is intimately related to, if not a function of, the impulse to moralize reality" (18).

White's essay is also significant to the discussion of the demands of realism for the way the founding terms of his analysis (the search for an origin to name one) reclaim, like Arac's own analysis, the very things they seek to question. This happens even though White's careful analysis purports to take account of its own inscription as one narrative among many as it undertakes to explain the structure of narratives in general. "Could we ever narrativize without moralizing?" he asks (27). What militates against this cautionary self-consciousness is the essay's quest for a sense of totality or mastery in either positing an origin to narrativity or trumpeting

consciousness as the external limit to narrative infection. In short, both forms of mastery block the general pulsion toward narrativizing that, for White, cannot be arrested by some figure of unity that is not already occasioned in the act of narration, that is not already a fictional unity.

"The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," Hayden White's essay on narrative in general and the "narrativization" of historical events in particular, begins with a statement that proposes a continuity between the nature of narrative and the nature of culture. For White, studying narrative form directly leads to the cultural modes of understanding and ordering reality that "authorize construction of a narrative account of reality" (14). White discovers that narrative techniques are mimetic of a culture's sense of order. More important, the protocols of this type of analysis hold out the possibility of a humanistic project. "To raise the question of the value of narrative," White declares, "is to invite reflection on the nature of culture and, possibly, even on the nature of humanity itself" (5).

Throughout this brief record of White's argument, one can see that White's analysis replicates the moment in Arac's argument when the literary and the social are defined according to the same terms and gestures. White's argument states the difference between narrative, culture, and humanity, but it also betrays this difference. The



difference between these three classifications is perceptible in the way White's argument maps the cause of, that is, what authorizes, a narrative account of reality. White proceeds from a study of narrative, to culture and, finally, humanity, the first term being subordinate to the next and so forth. However, this sequence of events never begins, has no first instance to build on and return to in the analysis, since each term does not represent the expression of a nuclear meaning exclusive to itself that would enable the differences between each one to be recorded. The problem is that the field to which each term is assigned simply cites the others. One is a citation of the other, with the provision that there is no first to which a citation is secondary or adventitious and, therefore, does not entitle one to isolate the first from the second moment in the sequence. Because each field cites the other, the priority of one over the other is invalidated on the premise that each field can be explained according to the same terms as its differences. Consequently, one always finds the same thing, or one never finds any of them, because it is in the sequence of progressions and subordinations that one can identify their differences. By eliding these boundaries, one cannot ascribe to one specific field the function of authorizing the others. Neither can one halt the fluidity between boundaries that will leave the question of their relationship to each other open to

repeated reconfigurations because there will not be a permanent resting place assigned to each field.

These goals notwithstanding, White's essay generally concentrates on a more specific topic. White propounds that the premium put on having historical events display the formal attributes of a narrative expresses a "desire" or a "wish." Narrative form delivers "an image of life that is and can only be imaginary" (27) in its attempt to gratify the desire that reality come to consciousness in the form of a story displaying "coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure" (27). Therefore, by being alert to the desire for narrative coherence, to the imaginary and arbitrary investment of order, one can ascertain the desires that underwrite a disciplinary discourse and criticize all claims to a methodologically proper mode of presenting events.

As the title of his essay states, narrativity is the focus of White's critical concerns, and that is what will receive his scrutiny. Narrativity possesses all of the elemental formal attributes one conventionally associates with structure (order, coherence, closure, fullness, integrity, and continuity). White, in fact, often uses them interchangeably. However, narrativity refers especially to the way "real events" appear to perception or enter our consciousness as readymade stories. It projects the illusion "that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherency of a story" (8).

For White, the relationship between narrativity and historiography is a necessary one, a compulsion--demanding. Narrativity, in other words, complements the project of historiography. White is throughout concerned with the elevation of narrative form, of narrativity, in modern Western historiography. His analysis attempts to answer the question: how can one account for its celebrated value? His description of the function of language in relation to what it represents, his designation of social relations as a "social system," his conception of the function of language in terms of disclosing sources, origins, and a specific context of production, and his description of cultural difference will guide my interpretations. In general, what occurs when White, while reflecting on the "nature" of narrative, culture, and "possibly" humanity and their origins, perpetuates the terms, categories, and structure he seeks to demystify?

According to White's argument, political, ontological, moral, and cultural investments motivate us to represent real events in the form of a narrative. But to acquire the legitimacy and authority of historically significant events, an account must coordinate these events within a structure of meaning that obscures these investments through reference to "reality." Recall that he writes: "the very distinction between real and imaginary events, basic to modern discussions of both history and fiction, presupposes a

notion of reality in which 'the true' is identified with 'the real' only insofar as it can be shown to possess the character of narrativity" (10). Both of these points can be adopted to explain the dimensions of the demand of realism. According to Arac, because the emergence of realism coincides with a scene of crisis and uncontrolled mobility, realism must create the impression that the world of "ordinary life" is structured, even if this impression is itself impermanent. And as we learned from Lewes, this representation was a response to demands projected onto reality itself; reality itself demands its representation. A shorthand form of stating this point is that realism demanded a form of narration that would represent the demands of reality. This rationalization is another form of obscuring the investments nurturing a representation.

Three requirements determine, writes White, this structure of meaning: a sense of closure, a consciousness of a social center, and an evaluating principle that selects the events to be incorporated into a narrative because they are calculated to have a moral and ethical value not allotted to other events. The possibility of narrative representation depends on the integration of these three features, of which the last is the most crucial. "It is this need or impulse," offers White, "to rank events with respect to their significance for the culture or group that is writing its own history that makes a narrative



representation of real events possible" (14). However much it "strains to produce the effect of having filled in all the gaps" (15), however much it sculpts an image of continuity and coherence, a representation cannot be classified as a historical narrative (or narrative in general) if it does not presuppose an evaluating principle for ranking events. To repeat White, a system of ranking "makes a narrative representation of real events possible" (emphasis added).

Assumptions similar to White's lead Susan Stewart to claim that "[r]ealistic genres do not mirror everyday life; they mirror its hierarchization of information. They are mimetic in the stance they take toward this organization and hence are mimetic of these values, not of the material world" (On Longing 26). One's "choice of aspect and the hierarchical organization of information," rather than one's "choice of subject," produce the effect of reality.

Ranking, then, fixes events in relatively stable positions; it engenders identities and entities, which appear identical to themselves in being designated as events holding meanings. As a result, it represents a closed system of values disguised as some objective or unconditional representation of events.

Insofar as historical stories can be completed, can be given narrative closure, can be shown to have had a plot all along, they give to reality the order of the ideal. This is why the plot of a historical narrative is always an embarrassment and has to be presented as "found" in the events

rather than put there by narrative techniques.  
(24)

Ranking, and its characteristic tactics of excluding certain events from the domain of significance (that is, not absent of significance, but deficient of a certain treasured significance), is comparable to the work of scapegoating. Scapegoating is more than a ritualistic, sociopolitical phenomenon. Dominick LaCapra, for instance, has made an attempt to think through some of the more subtle manifestations of scapegoating, particularly in how this mechanism of exclusion and abasement informs the constitution of binary oppositions and dialectical syntheses in discourses. Scapegoating, LaCapra remarks, has "subtle connections with the complex of metaphorical identity, narrative closure, and dialectical synthesis (all of which require the expulsion of heterogeneities and remainders)" (Soundings in Critical Theory 24).

Ranking simultaneously asserts a logical coherence and a moral, proprietary order. Ranking, as White defines it here, shares elements of Kamuf's thesis on the collaboration between moral and logical orders in verisimilitude. Ranking brings together an impulse for teleological certitude (continuity and the plenitude of meaningfulness) and for moral security (a normative authority vested in some social ideality or totality). This partnership, White states, consolidates itself in the impulse for narrative closure. The demand for closure demands "that sequences of real

events be assessed as to their significance as elements of a moral drama" (24).

What gets played out in this "moral drama" is a scene of social conflict and tension, a crisis of order, so to speak. During this "moral drama," the authority a social system claims for itself and the values it institutes are contested by an internal or an external force; they are scrutinized with a view to being revised, replaced, or reaffirmed. "It is because the events described conduce to the establishment of social order or fail to do so that they find a place in the narrative attesting to their reality" (26). Or as White writes elsewhere, "narrativity, whether of the fictional or factual type, presupposes the existence of a legal [i.e., social] system against or on behalf of which the typical agents of a narrative account militate" (17). The historiographer's "need to claim the authority to narrate" events is grounded in the historiographer's recognition of a "contest" surrounding the status of the events (22, emphasis added). That is, he writes "in the consciousness of the threat to a specific social system and the possibility of anarchy against which the legal [i.e., social] system might have been erected" (17). Like the historiographer described here, realist writers hinge their representations on a "need" that they can advert to in order to idealize their authority. Furthermore, realists construct a "threat" of their own--in this case, a crisis--



against which they can write and against which they can define themselves and bring themselves into being from an amorphous state of (non)existence that knows no bounds and identities. To make this event of self-engendering a moral and progressive act, it had to assume the form of a necessity rather than of some arbitrary desire. As Cottom states, in reference to the characterization of the lower classes in Victorian literature, "The middle class needed to attribute violence to others so that their own exertion of power would appear to be reasonable rather than willful" (Social Figures 42).

Moral standards are responsible for imputing to these events the "appear[ance of the] 'real.'" They appear demanding. And, White goes on to say, "it is this moralism which alone permits the work to end or, rather, to conclude." Consequently, "[w]here, in any account of reality, narrativity is present, we can be sure that morality or a moralizing impulse is present too" (26). Narrative closure heralds a closure in the history a narrative represents. Narrative closure delivers an imaginary resolution to the "moral drama" within which a "social system" and the authority it claims for itself are disputed.

However, this supposed desire for narrative closure, for moralizing, ranking, and rationalizing events, is fulfilled only if a historiographer ruminates on a "social



system" implicated in a "moral drama." S/he must exhibit signs of being self-conscious about the "social system" where events are meted a moral value, where they come to be accorded their meaning and significance in relation to other events. Consciousness of the intervening function of the "social system" in establishing historical events, that is, the becoming event of an event, must ground the historical writer's work. For the social system "alone could provide the diacritical markers for ranking the importance of events" (14). Since the "social system" "provides the diacritical markers for ranking the importance of events," to question this term is to question the basic assumptions of White's approach.

Nevertheless, there is much in White's essay that makes it invaluable to furthering our understanding of the mechanisms of narrative form. One of White's accomplishments is his description of the discursive conditions that determine the production and circulation of an event. That is, he describes what an event must technically exhibit to be advanced as an event. Ranking, closure, and a specialized moral impulse compose some of the "rules" that process an event. Insofar as the appearance of an event is governed and restricted by the eventuality of its moral composition, not every phenomenon or historical occurrence rises to the status of an event.

White argues that a narrative is always conflictual in its treatment of historical events because

[i]n order to qualify as "historical," an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence. Unless at least two versions of the same set of events can be imagined, there is no reason for the historian to take upon himself the authority of giving the true account of what really happened. (23)

In some sense, what causes the historian to give "the true account of what really happened" is also what causes realist writers to pursue their truth. But while the historian himself assumes the authority to give "the true account of what really happened," realist writers will locate their authority in some transcendent value that binds them to the pursuit of truth and thus denies them the element of choice.

I would like to suggest how White's formulations, while demystifying strategies of appropriation and propriety, reintroduce the same values. Although White acknowledges his own writing position in this analysis, that is, that his essay is another instance of narrative, bound to the same rules as other narratives, what he does not seem to entertain is the possibility of a viable challenge to the closure (and continuity, coherence, fullness) that he presumes to be necessary to narration in general. Thus, the self-awareness he cherishes may not be a sufficient attack on the illusion of narrative closure. Like the self-critical figure of authorship one discovered in Arac, this self-awareness might even function to preserve a sense of

closure and a grasp on a totality instead of presenting a basis for their removal. As White calls on them, consciousness and subjective self-criticism provide an impetus for appropriation and mastery. They remain an undifferentiated locus of identification, an origin whose authority goes uncontested and unanalyzed.

I must return, then, to my questions about the "social system." One of White's principle preoccupations throughout the essay is to call attention to the place of the "social system" in any historical narrative. No historical narrative can be both indifferent to a social system and claim to be a genuine historical narrative. In addition, no narrative closure or principle for ranking events in light of their moral significance could materialize without having recourse to the moral order that is their source and in turn an aspect of the social system. The preeminence given to this notion of a "social system" in his essay is perhaps best illustrated when White states that the "social system" is "the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell about a past" rests (18). Nearly every segment of his analysis turns on and toward the comprehension of this "social system." Yet White scarcely subjects this notion to a thorough investigation. Occasionally one will come across in White's commentary of one mode of historical writing or another an illustration of what he means. It "is nothing other than a system of human

relationships governed by law" (17). Or as he writes elsewhere: "the impulse to moralize reality" represents the effort "to identify it [i.e., reality] with the social system that is the source of any morality that we can imagine" (18).

Where White's presentation of this notion of a "social system" seems most troublesome and potentially uncritical is in the way it reduces irresolvable differences into a systematic totality, a homogeneous, unified, or essential structure--a system. One may find fault with this conclusion for the following reason. Simply, how could White allow this reduction to unfold when social relationships are defined as an unstable or embattled "moral drama"? If White admits to differences, which the invocation of such terms as conflict, tension, and struggles implies, he also seems to coordinate them within his expectation of a rationalized systematization; the differences appear only as a temporary interruption in a process inevitably leading to unity. In this sense, difference, like the crisis of realism, is a step in the eventual constitution of unity. It is a temporary postponement of a unity to come. Taken in this way, the "impulse to moralize" that he identifies with a "social system," even if the latter is said to consist of "diacritical markers," is vested with a sense of coherence. The "impulse to moralize" is generalized; it derives its



authority from a neutral and abstract origin that caters to anonymity, like the demand of realism.

Mary Wollstonecraft fostered a strategy such as this one in her Vindication of the Rights of Woman while criticizing the various forms of a master-slave relationship that for her typified in particular gender relations to the subjugation of women and the whole of social life from "brutes" to sovereigns. Although she considered reason and education as the great equalizers between genders and social classes, she also venerated middle-class morality above all others and translated it into a universal solvent by coupling it with reason to say that one and the other were inseparable, complementary, in the eyes of God. Middle-class morality was both historical and ahistorical, class bound and transcendent, unjustified and necessary, the servant of power and the offspring of truth, arbitrary and natural. While this morality was derived from middle-class values and expectations, it was also converted into a universal morality in which terms like "humanity" and the "individual" were substituted for more class-conscious classifications that blatantly marked one within a stratified society. In words like "humanity" and "individual," morality acquired a face of historical anonymity, since it originated from no one place in particular. It transcended all forms of difference: economic, social, gender, historical, material, and

political. Morality replaced power and authority as the preferred instrument of socialization, though this program of social assimilation needed to be stripped of any semblance of coerciveness if it were to appear natural. Those who failed to ascend to the plateau of enlightenment and the temple of morality were not just ignorant brutes; they were undeveloped, imperfect, unachieved, unrealized, and unconscious people. For example, she writes, "till women are led to exercise their understandings, they should not be satirized for their attachment to rakes; or even for being rakes at heart, when it appears to be the inevitable consequence of their education" (223). In short, they should not be held accountable for their ignominious behavior because they do not know what they do. Stalled in a state of aborted development, these children are denied the status of "individuals" or partners in "humanity" because these designations apply exclusively to moral and reasonable adults. These views are revived in Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, especially in his concept of the State, where one defines oneself in terms of a community, not in terms of class origins. To "carry us beyond the ideas and the wishes of the class to which we happen to belong," he states, one's "every-day" self, which keeps people "separate, personal, at war," must be discarded for one's "best self," which makes one "united, impersonal, at harmony." As long as one's "old untransformed self" (94-95)

prevails, that person is frozen in its development--"[s/he is] still an embryo," "inchoate and untrained" (93).

A more significant episode of this type of reduction perdures in White's almost flitting consideration of the term "moral" itself. Although White admits that each case of narrativity promulgates a distinctive structure of exclusion and ranking, the conceptual network to which the concept of "morality" is strategically situated remains constant. Put differently, it functions like an idealization. This idealization disregards the fact that

the order of rank of desirable things is not firm and the same at all times. . . . [For] the order of rank of desirable things itself is not erected or altered in accordance with moral considerations; but once it has been established it then determines whether an action is moral or immoral. (Human, All Too Human 36)

So, the idealization of order and its ability to rank is not moral, is above the moral and sets the moral in action.

A reading prepared to fault White's analysis for its periodic idealizations might presume that one could decisively winnow away, especially from one's own language, the recursiveness of idealizations. I want to avoid this presumption, which has been thoroughly criticized by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida, to name only a few. For, as Derrida has written, "even in aggressions and transgressions, we are consorting with a code to which metaphysics is tied irreducibly, such that every transgressive gesture reenclaves us--precisely by giving us



a hold on the closure of metaphysics--within this closure" (Positions, 12). If, then, some recourse to idealizations is unavoidable, can one imagine this scene differently? How, for instance, can one criticize the strategies of containment and the desire for order that define the demand of realism without reassembling the terms of this demand, a sense of order, and a more self-conscious mode of ranking?

In White's essay language is often described in classical terms: language transports. Language functions like a tool, an instrument. Its purpose is to facilitate the communication and recovery of a message, or a meaning, an expression, a sense held in reserve. Language, therefore, effaces itself before a signified content or an extratextual referent, before the consciousness of a subject of intention or before the ideality of the object or thing. Language, then, poses no threat to a ground of meaning that would always stop interpretations.

One can find at least three tendencies in White's essay that would suggest this instrumentalist description of the function of language. All three tendencies illustrate either how language holds in reserve an extratextual referent or how White's essay subtly represents language as a figure of transportation.

In realizing that the nature of narrativity is fundamentally fictional, one is comfortably on the path of discovering its proper identity as the effect of desires



and fantasies, with "origin[s] in wishes, daydreams, reveries" (27). White adds that "[i]n this enigma of a wish, this desire, we catch a glimpse of the cultural function of narrativizing discourse in general, an intimation of the psychological impulses behind the apparently universal need not only to narrate but to give to events an aspect of narrativity" (8). (Recall that wishes and desires represent for Nietzsche and Freud moments of conflict and parts of a narrative. This means that these "origins" are themselves objects of interpretation and narration, not the foundation of narration. They signify an origin that is nonoriginary, since it does not escape the effects of narration that, as an origin, it puts into play and therefore is supposedly detached from.) One passes from desire to an implied culture and vice versa, for when one determines the intention of narrativity in a "cultural function," a determined cultural center becomes the decisive agent of this intention. To the extent that certain desires and wishes are made intelligible and, subsequently, derivative of an equally intelligible cultural source and vice versa, the fiction of coherence and the fiction of a coherent image of reality are replaced with a center (culture) that is itself implicitly regarded as coherent (a "universal need"). One has arrived at the "social system." The coherence that White appears to criticize in narration is then displaced onto the unexamined categories of his own

profession: system, origin, universal need, and culture, for instance. In other words, White does not appear to ask whether the texts he examines exile the authority of origins.

The identification of an origin with a cultural function reifies into a coherent totality the very notion of authority and of ranking that the analysis of narrativity was supposed to dislodge. In other words, if authority and ranking are potent features of an imaginary coherence, the identification of a cultural function as a source overlooks the differential relations within and against which cultural values and appeals to authority are produced and denied.

Something like this problem also informs White's essay when, in asserting the universality of narration, he equally asserts, "narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (6); or, "We may not be able fully to comprehend specific thought patterns of another culture, but we have relatively less difficulty understanding a story coming from another culture, however exotic that culture may appear to us" (5-6); and when, after White extols the need for a "genuinely historical interest" in studying the documents of the past, he asserts that with such a comparative study, "we might be able to understand why, in our own time and cultural condition, we could conceive of narrativity itself as a problem" (10).

Difference, distance, and heterogeneity are transcended by the force of narration. Narration transforms otherness and strangeness into a source of familiarity and homogeneity. A common ground exists. Moreover, this simple transmission idealizes the "nature" of the participants. Each participant is addressed as a unity. As a result, intracultural inequalities are systematically dissipated. Force, between and within these participants, disappears in the relatively uninterrupted transmission (or transportation) of messages, whose immediacy and transparency is contracted in the guarantee that the message always arrives at its destination. Messages cannot be perfidious. There is no room for excess. What is also shaded from critical apprehension in the notion of transmission is how the reception, interpretation, and institutionalization of a message may differ under differing conditions and protocols, and how these discontinuities alter the very possibility of unveiling the "nature" of a subject. The capacity for the context to vary, for the message to be read otherwise, complicates the transmission of the message. Consequently, White's statement that "the impulse to narrate" is "natural" is an obfuscation.

What I have tried to call attention to in this protracted discussion of White's essay on narration is the way an analysis that asserts the boundlessness of narration, an essay that demystifies the institutional and disciplinary



fetters that arbitrarily foreclose this boundlessness, can yet foist new fetters upon narration. To dismiss White's analysis categorically would be a mistake, however. Insofar as his analysis of historical writing finds that the staging of a "moral drama" supplies a content to the narrative, the event of a "crisis" is at the very "center" of the question of narration. That is what demands to be represented and, as White's essay demonstrates, what calls forth, engenders, the narrative--it is the "possibility" of narration. Without this demand, narrative and narrativity would not "realize" themselves. But as I hope to show in the reading of Hardy, the demands to narrate and to engender a narrative are convoked in narration. In other words, the demand for narration is also the "product," and not only the origin, of narration. "Necessity," Nietzsche writes in The Will to Power, "is not a fact but an interpretation" (297). This means that terms like necessity, crisis, and demand are nontotalizable. They do not represent an origin, center, or cause that escapes interpretation because they are nonoriginary. This is quite different from saying that they cannot be totalized because they are subject to an infinite number of interpretations, a notion that ultimately may recover a sense of the origin even if only in infinity. In "Structure, Sign, and Play," Derrida explains the difference between these two interpretations, the two interpretations of interpretation, as he calls it.



There are thus two interpretations, of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play. (292)

On the subject of "conceiving the limit of totalization,"  
Derrida writes:

Totalization can be judged impossible in the classical style: one then refers to the empirical endeavor of either a subject or a finite richness which it can never master. There is too much, more than one can say. But nontotalization can also be determined in another way: no longer from the standpoint of a concept of finitude as relegation to the empirical, but from the standpoint of the concept of play. If totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field--that is, language and a finite language--excludes totalization. This field is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions. . . . One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center's place in its absence--this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a supplement. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. (289)

In Part 2, I will examine how Thomas Hardy's writings represent a fictional world in which experience and meaning (that is, the expression of one's intentions) resist

totalization. This resistance will be based on the attempt to individualize experience rather than subordinate the individual to some generalized or codified experience. The attempt to individualize experience and to provide a sincere representation of the world appear in Hardy's writings as necessary and demanding endeavors. Although part of the reason for rendering these two endeavors as necessary is to thwart the codification of individual experiences, there is another reason. Hardy and his characters will repeatedly encounter the force of language or a differentiated system of values that will dispossess them of the intentions they attribute to their words or actions. Like Arac's realists, Hardy will invoke certain necessities in order to prevent this: the necessity of a sincere representation and the necessity of a reflective reader.

PART 2

THOMAS HARDY'S RESPONSES

CHAPTER 4  
THE INTERVIEW

And his meaning chanced to reach.

--Thomas Hardy, "In St Paul's a While Ago," C P  
717

Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners.  
--J. S. Mill, On Liberty 110

The fictional world of Thomas Hardy's novels is characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity, misrepresentation, and doubt. Within this world, characters will often voice their disappointment at being misunderstood by individual characters or society as a whole. In his poetry, letters, and novels, Hardy often regards this failure to understand an individual's idiosyncratic emotions, convictions, and experiences as the cause of countless errors and injustices. As a result, Hardy's writings regularly dwell on the necessity of developing a power of understanding that overcomes personal opinion and social prejudice, egoism and speculation, subjective convictions and traditional assumptions. This is not an easy task, since the forces in



the world that prevent characters from developing a power of understanding are vigilant. However, the interview seems to provide a sanctuary from these forces and to allow characters to develop a power of understanding.

Yet Hardy will show that even in the interview meaning is subject to socialization, despite the fact that the interview begins when the characters involved withdraw from the world. Although the interview brings characters face-to-face to allow them to communicate freely and directly, it remains a place of disagreement and social contact. The fact that one's experience and one's intentions require such a setting in order to have these two elements recognized, or understood, demonstrates that one is never quite sure of the meaning of one's experience or intention. A second party is required to confirm what one believes to be certain and self-evident. Consequently, while the interview is premised on withdrawing from the world, the need for understanding and clarity accentuates both the need to respect an individual's experiences and the need to expose to the world, i.e., to a second party, the nature of those experiences. The interview is both worldly and unworldly. In other words, it is not absolutely divided from the world; instead, it is related to the world.

One of the most poignant episodes in Thomas Hardy's Jude the Obscure appears in chapter four of Part First, "At Marygreen." Jude, immersed as usual in meditation as he

walks slowly down an unoccupied stretch of road, suddenly finds himself being overtaken by a swiftly moving pedestrian, the quack-doctor, Vilbert. They talk for a while. Almost as quickly as Vilbert strode up to Jude on the road, the conversation turns to the topic of language. Delighted to find someone who can provide him with the necessary Greek and Latin grammars to begin his academic training, Jude makes a bargain with Vilbert. Vilbert will supply Jude with the grammars if Jude will act as his marketing agent and recommend to the village the doctor's dubious concoctions. Jude keeps to his promise. But when Vilbert returns to the area and meets Jude for a second time, the doctor has forgotten the boy and his promise to bring the precious grammars.

Although disappointed, Jude is soon after presented with a second opportunity to get a set of the Greek and Latin grammars. He writes to his former schoolmaster, Mr. Phillotson, who, hoping to become a university graduate, left Jude's village to go to Christminster. This time Jude's efforts are rewarded; Phillotson mails him a package containing the desired texts.

Cherishing the package that contains two thin books, Jude goes "into a lonely place."<sup>1</sup> Before we see Jude opening the package to inspect the grammars, the narrator interrupts to relate to the reader Jude's prior assumptions about the "sort of process that was involved in turning the

expressions of one language into those of another" (49). "[Jude] concluded," the narrator states, "that a grammar of the required tongue would contain, primarily, a rule, prescription, or clue of the nature of a secret cipher, which, once known, would enable him, by merely applying it, to change at will all words of his own speech into those of the foreign one" (49). Opening the package and turning randomly to one of the pages in the first book he happens upon, however, Jude learns a trying lesson. "[Jude] learned for the first time," the narrator goes on to state, "that there was no law of transmutation, as in his innocence he had supposed" (50). Jude has blundered; his naive expectation has led him to commit a "gigantic error" (50). In his Figural Language in the Novel, Ramon Saldivar explains that "Jude's desired 'law of transmutation,' the 'secret cipher' to a system of translation, could exist only if a prior permanent code existed to allow a free substitution of signifiers for one, autonomous, permanently present signified" (160). Saldivar adds, "Jude intuits that language is not a fixed system through which meaning can be 'transmuted' from one system to another. . . . [N]o master code exists to guarantee the authority of the translation" (161, 166).

At this critical moment in the chapter, the narrator imagines how Jude could have been comforted in his despair and reassured that his assumption about a "law of

transmutation" had not been entirely a fantasy. (After Jude realizes that there was no "law of transmutation," the narrator parenthetically states, "there was [a law of transmutation], in some degree, but the grammarian [of the Latin text] did not recognize it.") "Somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble, and might have cheered him by saying that his notions were further advanced than those of his grammarian" (50). Immediately after proposing this idea, the narrator states peremptorily, "But nobody did come, because nobody does" (50).

In his despair, Jude wishes "that he had never been born" (50). In the last paragraph of the chapter--in fact, in the last sentence of the last paragraph--the narrator reiterates Jude's wish. However, the reiteration changes subtly and significantly the sense of Jude's wish. "But nobody did come, because nobody does; and under the crushing recognition of his gigantic error Jude continued to wish himself out of the world" (50).

Specifically, there is little difference between the initial recording of Jude's wish in the next-to-last paragraph and the reiteration in the last paragraph of that wish. Both statements express the same basic meaning, which the narrator confirms in stating that Jude "continued to wish." The wish, therefore, seems not to have changed. But



can one say the same thing about the expression of that wish, the way it is being said?

The reader goes from reading that Jude wished "that he had never been born" to reading that "Jude continued to wish himself out of the world." The transition is subtle, almost imperceptible. To begin with, the second expression of Jude's wish for self-extinction seems less direct than the first. In saying this, I do not mean that the second is more metaphorical than the first. On the contrary, both expressions metaphorically (and perhaps even literally) convey Jude's despair at having discovered that his naive expectations have been proven wrong. Yet the second expression of Jude's despair also modifies the terms of the initial wish. The second expression of Jude's wish turns on the issue of removing oneself from the world. Wishing himself "out of the world," Jude seems to reaffirm his wish for self-extinction; but in wishing himself "out of the world," Jude also redefines the initial wish. His disappointment and despair instill in him a desire to flee from a world in which nobody comes and in which language is a problem, or something to labor against. One should remember here that both of Jude's wishes are the direct result of his "gigantic error," that is, his mistaken understanding about the nature of language and about the relationship between languages.

However, the narrator suggests that Jude's "gigantic error" may have been caused by either ignorance or expectation, depending on how one looks at it. In his "innocence," for instance, Jude misconstrues how languages operate and how they are composed. What he has ignorantly imagined in his innocence to be a relatively simple operation of transmutation requiring little effort on his part is unveiled to him as an extremely burdensome enterprise when he opens the grammar book for the first time. "This was Latin and Greek, then, was it, this grand delusion! The charm he had supposed in store for him was really a labor like that of Israel in Egypt" (50).

But in his innocence, Jude is also led to suppose, as in anticipating, some things. "[I]n his innocence he had supposed" that there was such a "law of transmutation." Opening the grammar book, Jude "learnt for the first time" that the reverse was true. In addition, Jude haplessly discovers that "[t]he charm he had supposed in store for him was really a labor" (emphasis added). Expectations, suppositions, anticipations, assumptions, and "childish ideas" collapse beneath the test of experience.

What Jude learns (but quickly forgets) about suppositions here is not unique to him or to this novel. Other characters in Hardy's fiction learn that there is a certain belatedness, or temporal lag, to meaning; it is retrospectively ascribed. There is a difference internal to

meaning that divides it from itself, suspends it, and therefore can set it adrift. This belatedness is figured throughout Hardy's novels, and in this episode in Jude, in terms of the difference between Jude's supposition and the "first time" that he learns his supposition is wrong. For Hardy, this difference is defined as experience. Experience confirms or refutes a supposition, expectation, or an axiom; experience, in other words, makes a meaning intelligible but also unpredictable. Consider the following from Far from the Madding Crowd: "With the majority such an opinion is shelved with all those trite aphorisms which require some catastrophe to bring their tremendous meanings thoroughly home" (199). The unstated assumption of this passage is that the meanings of aphorisms have been exiled, rendered homeless. The reference to the catastrophe that would bring them "thoroughly home" implies that: under other circumstances their return is partial, at best; they continue to wander away from home; or they have been wandering meaninglessly, circulating without direction or specificity. Too general to mean anything to anyone in particular, they are meaningless, or they are meaningful only in the most general and therefore inapplicable way. Experience turns these meanings home by a process of particularization in which one specifically identifies with the general. But if one person's catastrophe can bring these meanings home, it is also possible for anyone who

experiences a similar or different catastrophe to enter into this homecoming. Therefore, while the quality of belatedness or experience can bring a meaning to its full realization, "thoroughly home," this same quality also exposes meaning to distortions, mutations, or misunderstandings. Meanings can be brought home not only to one person but to many precisely because they are homeless--because they have no particular place to begin with. And even when they are brought "thoroughly home," they may have many different homes. The same rule is responsible for bringing a meaning home and keeping it homeless, anchoring it and casting it adrift.

So there is no simple law of transmutation, as Jude learns; but as the narrator states parenthetically, there is "to some degree" a law of transmutation. Jude's wish to be out of the world constitutes an attempt to remove himself from the "negative" effects of belatedness, one of which is that language can betray, rebel as well as reveal. "In the course of a month or two after the receipt of the books Jude had grown callous to the shabby trick played him by the dead languages" (51, emphasis added).

Although his ignorance, inexperience, and failed expectations contribute to his wish to be out of the world, it is the question of language that compels Jude and Hardy's other characters to seek a way out of their world, to define themselves as being outside of the world's prescribed



identities, or to seek a more sympathetic world. Being in the world or out of the world involves an identification with certain assumptions about the nature of language. How one relates to the world, in other words, is a question inseparable from how the question of language "relates" meaning. As Saldivar states, "Jude intuitively feels that language is not a fixed system through which meaning can be 'transmuted' from one system to another. Yet this is precisely the insight that Jude refuses to apply to his other readings of the world around him. Underlying the errors of both natural and textual translation is the illusion that reality is autonomous and stable, when it is really discontinuous and uncentered within the fictive world of Hardy's novel" (161).

Saldivar, for instance, finds that many of Jude's problems originate in his response to the "messages" he receives from the world. Jude is repeatedly engaged in translating these messages.<sup>2</sup> One of the earliest acts of translation occurs when Jude climbs to the top of a barn to get a clearer perspective of the horizon, looks out in the direction of Christminster, and imagines that the city is calling out to him, its "message" being delivered on a breeze that has travelled from Christminster. "Suddenly there came along this wind something towards him--a message from the place--from some soul residing there, it seemed. Surely it was the sound of bells, the voice of the city, faint and musical, calling to him, 'We are happy here!'"

(43). Jude's translation of such "messages" often leads him astray, as during the episode of "ecstasy" in which he "lapses from common-sense and custom" (53) and is called back by a roving policeman.<sup>3</sup>

During such episodes, Jude is set apart from his surroundings and society. But Jude's troubles with language are perhaps demonstrated even more clearly in his misguided faith in the figural language he uses to refer to Christminster (45). Jude literalizes these figures. Like countless other characters in Hardy's fiction, Jude unwarily trusts in the possibility of a direct, instant meaning. "Jude's illusions result from a figurative language taken literally," Saldivar writes. "There is no natural truth written anywhere which might be read without being altered in the process" (174). Jude believes that a meaning can be brought "thoroughly home," forwarded unmolested to its proper place, and received unaltered. No wonder Jude reacts with astonishment when, after one of his casual outings with Arabella, he returns with Arabella to her home and finds that everyone present considers their outing an unequivocal sign of their engagement--a meaning he had never expected.

Immediately that the door was opened he found, in addition to her parents, several neighbors sitting round. They all spoke in a congratulatory manner, and took him seriously as Arabella's intended partner.

They did not belong to his set or circle, and he felt out of place and embarrassed. He had not

meant this: a mere afternoon of pleasant walking with Arabella, that was all he had meant. (68)

Apparently, Arabella's parents and neighbors have made a mistake. They appear to have misinterpreted, or mistranslated, the significance of Jude's intentions toward Arabella. In some sense, their mistake is like Jude's own "gigantic error": they assume that the actions of the lovers clearly contain a clue, a cipher, that coincides with a preestablished pattern of behavior that can only mean one thing, that Jude and Arabella are engaged. Within this "set or circle" such actions have an unequivocal meaning; it is customary for lovers to behave in this way. In matters of custom, no discussion is necessary; no reasons need be given to explain one's actions or intentions. No thought is given to the possibility that Jude's intentions could be incompatible with the customary interpretation of such patterns of behavior. Jude's actions do not appear singular, unconventional, or idiosyncratic. To the parents and neighbors, Jude and Arabella are simply reenacting the rituals of this "set or circle." The meaning of their actions is irrefutable, direct, translatable without error: the meaning of this behavior comes "thoroughly home." One of Hardy's most significant refrains throughout his fiction does not appear to slip into the consciousness of this "set or circle": the reminder, as the narrator of Desperate Remedies declares, that "things are not what they seem."<sup>4</sup>



Jude's astonishment is in part the result of being a stranger to this system of interpretation, to this culture's customs and understandings. He "reads" differently. For him his outing with Arabella does not convey the serious implications that the parents and neighbors ascribe to it. What Jude meant in taking Arabella for a walk is completely lost, or out of place, to this "set and circle," just as their interpretation makes Jude feel "out of place." It is as if they, like Anthony Green from Two on a Tower, let themselves be "'carried away by opinion . . . since common usage would have it.'"<sup>5</sup> Had he spoken, direct information could have washed away the errors derived from circumstantial information. His intentions would have been made clear, or one assumes so. But he does not say a word.

This passage, however, also suggests how Jude may be a stranger to his own intentions. As long as Jude believes that his intentions have been misinterpreted there is the chance that these mistakes could be rectified. Once rectified, meaning would be brought "thoroughly home." Then at least Jude would know with comfort and confidence where and how things stood; there would be no doubt in his mind as to their place. But what if the failure to recognize Jude's intentions was not produced by an error in translating these intentions? What if his intentions appeared uncertain even to himself? What if this episode shows that an



intended meaning can never expect to govern our communication?

Let us imagine that Jude could find himself in a place where he would not feel "out of place." What sort of difference would that make, especially to the issue of his intentions? Presumably, there his intentions might be brought "thoroughly home" since such a place would be the site of a harmony between those present and engaged in communication. Such a harmony is precisely absent in Jude's meeting with Arabella's parents and neighbors. And as that episode illustrates, the absence of such a harmony endangers the reception of one's intended meaning, regardless of how certain one is about what he or she means. The interview will try to achieve this harmony.

However, imposing certain conditions to the elucidation of one's meaning says something about the communication and for the transmission of meaning, and about the function of language as a medium for the expression of one's intentions. While such conditions aim to guarantee a continuity of meaning, the need for these conditions also testifies to their inadequacy. There is a certain apotropaic logic to the installation of these conditions. They invoke the very thing they wish to defend against. In other words, although these conditions are devised to guarantee a continuity of meaning, a harmony between interlocutors, they also show that these conditions are

indispensable and without them a continuity of meaning might be continually perturbed. Intentions and meanings might then venture out into the world unanchored, groundless, susceptible to random changes and uncontrollable alterations. In short, one's intentions might not be brought "thoroughly home." The meaning of Jude's behavior, for instance, would be potentially meaningful and not immanently so, ascribed as the occasions, frames, positions, or contexts changed and not invariably fixed to his conscious expression. The desire to impose such conditions will then manifest itself as an arbitrary means of authorizing or disqualifying certain positions, occasions, or perspectives. Jude, for instance, assumes that if the conditions were right, if he were in the proper circle or set, a harmony would be achieved. The interview will attempt to erect a set of conditions that will guarantee the communication of one's meaning.

Along with the interview, the demand for a sincere and conscientious fiction and for a reflective reader are all examples of this attempt to set up the conditions for meaningful communication and understanding in Hardy's fiction.

Before I turn to the significance of the interview in Hardy's fiction, I want to say a few more words that pertain to the issues I have been discussing in reference to Jude.

Jude's predicament is not peculiar to him or the novel Jude the Obscure. Other characters in Hardy's fiction are equally harried by the "shabby tricks" language can play; other characters are equally astonished that their intentions are not brought "thoroughly home" and that meaning seems groundless; and other characters, as a result, feel "out of place," primarily because they intuit that the language they wish to possess may in fact possess them.

For example, words betray several characters in Desperate Remedies. On more than one occasion, a character in this novel learns that once spoken, a word can almost assume a life of its own. Words can appear to function almost autonomously, exhibiting an unwillingness to be the sole property of any one master.<sup>6</sup> Words can stimulate conjectures or responses quite remote from what one consciously intends. Rather than bring one's intended meaning "thoroughly home," words can send it maundering. Cytherea Graye, for instance, "had not meant [Edward Springrove] to translate her words about returning home so literally at first; she had not intended him to learn her secret" (DR 76). In another episode a few pages later, Cytherea Graye, though she was "conscious of her success in producing the kind of word she had wished to produce," nevertheless "trembled in suspense as to how it would be taken" (81). Moreover, while revealing some bit of information, words can suddenly be transformed into

glaringly treacherous reminders of something that should never have been said. It may be impossible to call them back, a lesson that Cytherea Aldclyffe learns after the fact. "The impulsive rush of feeling which had led Miss Aldclyffe to indulge in this revelation, trifling as it was, died out immediately her words were beyond recall" (DR 105). Cytherea Graye experiences a similar regret. "The instant the words were out she would have given worlds to have been able to recall them" (DR 152). Words can even betray a suppressed or unconscious emotion, a betrayal that is at once a revelation of and a revolt against what a speaker wants to suppress. "Yet it was all unconsciously said in words which betrayed a lingering tenderness of love at every unguarded turn" (DR 170); "She looked at him in utter perplexity. The words could only have been said in jest, and yet they seemed to savour of a tone the furthest remove from jesting" (DR 360).

One of the most obvious consequences of this phenomenon is that words and actions display an almost inexhaustible signifying potential. Reflecting on something Edward Springrove says, Cytherea Graye is not content with its "commonplace" import and imagines it harbors a series of deeper meanings.

His parting words, "Don't forget me," she repeated to herself a hundred times, and though she thought their import was probably commonplace, she could not help toying with them,--looking at them from all points, and investing them with meanings of love and faithfulness,--ostensibly entertaining



such meanings only as fables wherewith to pass the time, yet in her heart admitting, for detached instants, a possibility of their deeper truth. (DR 67).

There is, of course, a significant difference between the events of this episode and those figured in Jude's unpleasant confrontation with Arabella's parents and neighbors. Although the displacement of a character's intentions is a topic that both episodes address in some fashion, they differ in regard to setting, circumstances, and the emotions of the characters. The last of these dramatic differences is especially important because it recalls the condition that leads Jude to feel "out of place" and, perhaps, his wish to be "out of the world." Unlike Cytherea, who is comfortably ensconced in her room, Jude is immersed in the world, but in a world that presents itself to him as a discontinuous reality with conflicting "sets" and "circles" of identity and meaning. The displacement of Jude's intentions, as well as the displacement of Jude's position, has its roots in this immersion.

As Hardy's fiction repeatedly emphasizes, being in the world exposes one to the same problems that Jude must suffer. These problems include residing within a discontinuous reality, having one's intentions displaced, expressing oneself with words and languages that betray, and witnessing one's identity being carried off by the misrepresentations of others. All of these problems can

endanger one's status as an individual, for they can transform one into the property of others' representations. "'Realy, sir,'" states Jane, the vicar's parlor-maid in Under the Greenwood Tree, "' 'tis thoughted by many in town and country that--.'" To which the vicar responds, "'Town and country!--Heavens, I had no idea that I was public property in this way!'"<sup>7</sup> Of course, the vicar is speaking metaphorically. But his risible metaphor also suggests that one can appear to be the possession of language, an object of exchange rather than an autonomous subject that possesses language.

While Hardy's fiction repeatedly dwells on such problems, his fiction also tries to resolve these worldly problems. Several novels suggest that characters can find a refuge from these worldly problems in the conditions that an "interview" offers. "[T]he battle-field of life is temporarily fenced off by a hard and fast line--the interview" (DR 86). Just what are these conditions? An interview offers a model of communication presumably founded on the individual and on an understanding of language as a reliable and direct medium of expression. Precipitated by a withdrawal from the world, an interview appears as a necessary step toward clarity, certainty, and understanding.

Hardy, however, is not the only nineteenth-century writer to recognize in his or her writings the symbolic value of the interview. J. S. Mill's On Liberty, for

instance, can be read as an appeal for such a practice. Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton, as some have already observed, proposes that factional disagreements could be attenuated if only the groups in conflict could get together in some colloquy to discuss their disagreements. In Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre, the evening conferences and interviews between Jane and Rochester free them from the ligatures of propriety, formulaic conversations, social conventions, and customs so that they may communicate directly and candidly as individuals. During one of their most dramatic conferences in the evening, for instance, Jane says, "'I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh--it is my spirit that addresses your spirit'" (222).

In Oliver Twist, the conference and interview are solemn occasions, but they are also moments of imaginary transcendence where truth can manifest itself as an unworldly thing. During one interview, Oliver discloses "his simple history" (266). The disclosure transforms him into a figure of "the dark evidence of human error," which in turn impels the narrator to wonder:

if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride shut out--where would be the injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong, that each day's life brings with it!<sup>8</sup>

In the same novel, when Nancy visits Rose Maylie in Chapter XL (which appropriately bears the inscription, "A strange



interview, which is a sequel to the last chapter" [357]), Dickens uses the occasion to transform Nancy into an unlikely messenger of truth. According to the social prejudices of the novel's fictive world, Nancy's physical appearance would disconnect her and anything she had to say from the realm of truth. However, the interview changes her into the voice of truth (360), thereby clarifies the muddled history of Oliver's life and, in the process, rouses the understanding and compassion of her social and moral superior (361). More important, just as in Oliver's interview, Nancy's interview with Rose is enshrined in an unworldly atmosphere. "Rose Maylie, overpowered by this extraordinary interview, which had more the semblance of a rapid dream than an actual occurrence, sank into a chair and endeavored to collect her wandering thoughts" (363). This passage seems to imply that the revelation of truth, or the condition of truth, occurs outside of the world of the "actual." In other words, truth and clarity arise within an imaginary space, in a dream or during a leap of the imagination. In this place, one might feel secure in knowing that the world's troubles--doubts, disagreements, prejudices, and unsympathetic conventions--have been suspended. But this security and certainty belong to the imaginary world of the interview, just as the revelation of truth and the thing truth belong to this imaginary world,



the unworldly. For Dickens, the unworldly represents a greater, more all-encompassing actuality.

In Hardy's fiction, the characters that participate in an interview typically withdraw from their world. There is nothing common about this place and what happens within it. In fact, each interview arises from a necessity, a point that some character is likely to bring up during the interview. Hardy's adaptation of the interview is in some ways indistinguishable from those versions referred to above. Generally, the characters involved attempt to slough off, even if only temporarily, some of the effects the world's conventions and prejudices have upon them. Conventions, customs, opinions, convictions, and prejudices are all forms of distraction. In the worst of cases, these distractions can create doubt, confusion, uncertainty, misunderstanding, or ignorance. And as a result, some characters are compelled to initiate an interview in order to suspend these distractions and acquire a clear understanding of an ambiguous situation.

In Under the Greenwood Tree, a garden serves as the site of an interview; there one can speak freely, plainly, and unashamedly about important issues.

It was the custom in Mellstock and its vicinity to discuss matters of pleasure and ordinary business inside the house, and to reserve the garden for very important affairs: a custom which, as is supposed, originated in the desirability of getting away at such times from the other members of the family when there was only one room for living in, though it was now quite as frequently

practised by those who suffered from no such limitation to the size of their domiciles. (166)

When Phillotson visits Jude at work, their interview begins after both "withdrew from the other workmen" (JO 183).

Swithin St. Cleeve and Viviette Constantine meet in the former's shack below his observatory; here, they were "unperceived" by the "outside world" (TT 186). And so on.

One of the two characters involved in the interview is typically the object of misunderstanding and unfounded speculation. Despite the world's erroneous opinion of this character, what it assumes seems to carry the weight of authority behind it. In fact, while the presence of the interview is in itself a challenge to the assumptions of this world, its presence is also a begrudging recognition of the authority of the world's assumptions. Recall that Mr. Maybold says in Under the Greenwood Tree, "Town and country!--Heavens, I had no idea that I was public property in this way!" (98). Even someone who distrusts the assumptions that the world generates, someone who appears to know the truth, can be made to doubt his or her understanding because of what the world holds to be true. "'I have heard something so--so--to your discredit,'" Viviette tells Swithin, "'and I know it can't be true! I know you are constancy itself; but your constancy produces strange effects in people's eyes!'" (TT 185). Although Viviette says that she is certain about what she knows, her appointment with Swithin indicates that she is seeking

confirmation from Swithin, which in turn may suggest that her certainty is tenuous.

Consequently, while one of the objectives of the interview is to clarify the accidents of misunderstanding that commonplace perceptions and unexamined convictions foment, the interview is also concerned with challenging the authority of the world to speak for or against an individual. What disturbs and infuriates Eustacia during and after her "unpropitious interview" with Mrs. Yeobright is that her claim to speak for herself is being arrogated. "'I won't have wicked opinions passed on me by anybody.'"9 "'Who can be worse than a wife who encourages a lover, and poisons her husband's mind against his relative? Yet that is now the character given to me,'" Eustacia adds (RN 266).

Against the blind faith in the authority of the world's assumptions and beliefs, the interview opposes the power of understanding. According to Hardy, opinions, beliefs, assumptions, and convictions did nothing to foster one's understanding of an individual. If anything, like a society's customs and conventions, they did more to ruin it by making it increasingly more difficult for anyone to be recognized as an individual, rather than as the "property" of public speculation. "'Pa'son Mayble and I were as good friends all through it as if we'd been sworn brothers. Ay, the man's well enough; 'tis what's put in his head that spoils him, and that's why we've got to go'" to speak with



him, confesses Dewy, after he meets with the vicar (UGT 106). Assuring the possibility of understanding is something that the interviews constantly dwell on and progress towards, especially by compelling the characters to address each other in a plain, direct, and free form. Jude, for instance, admits to Phillotson, "'I am glad of your kindness in coming to talk plainly to me about it'" (JO 184); and grateful that Viviette has decided to meet with him to discuss a popular misrepresentation of his behavior, Swithin confides, "'How dear of you, Viviette, to come at once and have it out with me, instead of brooding over it with dark imaginings, and thinking bitter things of me, as many women would have done!'" (TT 186).

Although one of the goals of the interview is to reject any wrong conclusion about someone's behavior and history, its most significant function is to demonstrate the necessity of the power of understanding and to present the means of attaining this power. Reconciling the opposed opinions of the two parties is as rare in the interviews as the interviews themselves are in Hardy's fiction. But having the parties agree is not a condition of understanding. "'And I'm glad we've let en know our minds,'" says Dewy, referring to Mr. Maybold. "'And though, beyond that, we ha'n't got much by going, 'twas worth while'" (UGT 107). Consequently, it is not uncommon to find that the characters who participate in an interview



rarely end on amicable terms. Often the interviews stress that the characters could not speak as "friends" or that they continued to be contentious acquaintances after the interview concluded. "'You know, Dewy,'" Mr. Maybold states during their interview, "'it is often said how difficult a matter it is to act up to our convictions and please all parties. It may be said with equal truth, that it is difficult for a man of any appreciativeness to have convictions at all'" (UGT 104). Understanding, or appreciativeness (a term that Hardy uses interchangeably), requires that a character suspend what he or she believes to be true until it can be verified. "'There's really no believing half you hear about people nowadays,'" one character declares after an interview (UGT 107).

It is no coincidence that the interview begins when someone arrives unexpectedly. Nor is it a coincidence that characters being interrogated during the interview utter a word of surprise when they are confronted with the fact that their actions have led to false conclusions, which leads to a familiar: "'I thought you understood?'" (JO 184). Both themes correspond to the interview's emphasis on the individualization of experience and the necessity for developing a power of understanding that refuses to accept on faith the declarations of the world, since those declarations have no basis in the individual's experience and its idiomatic meaning. Concluding her interview with

Eustacia, an antagonized Mrs. Yeobright pronounces, "'If any one says I have come here to question you without good grounds for it, that person speaks untruly. If any one says that I attempted to stop your marriage by any but honest means, that person, too, does not speak the truth'" (RN 266). For this reason, the interview is an unpredictable event. The "issue of the interview is as likely to be a vast change for the worse as for the better."<sup>10</sup> One cannot anticipate its outcome, the way one might believe without discussion or assume without understanding what sort of behavior one has witnessed. This unpredictability is precisely the point: the interview takes people out of stereotyped thought and routine behavior.

The difference between the interview and the "outside world" is not only that in the interview important issues and experiences are discussed and that in the "outside world" they are not. One does not have to read too far into any of Hardy's novels to realize that Hardy's fictional world teems with scenes of characters engaged in discussions. Nearly everywhere the narrator takes the reader, some discussion is taking place. There is no end to it. The marriage between Lucetta and Farfrae in The Mayor of Casterbridge, for instance, "had been discussed noisily on kerbstones, confidentially behind counters, and jovially at the Three Mariners."<sup>11</sup> Apparently, there is no escaping

it, even in isolation, as when Edward tries to warn Cytherea Graye.

"I do so long to secure you from the intrusion of that unpleasant past, which will often and always be thrust before you as long as you live the shrinking solitary life you do now--a life which purity chooses, it may be; but to the outside world it looks like the enforced loneliness of neglect and scorn--and tongues are busy inventing a reason for it which does not exist." (DR 315)

In addition, the difference between the misleading assumptions and beliefs in the world and the discoveries that occur within the interview is not entirely determined by one's proximity to truth. The truth, Hardy's fiction often illustrates, can be accidentally acquired, mysteriously deduced, and irresponsibly communicated.

Consequently, what matters in the interview, what distinguishes its discussions from the babble of the outside world, is not so much the fact that there is a discussion of experience, but that within the interview, one talks differently about experience. How one talks about experience and who has the authority to discuss it are the issue. The interview exemplifies what manner of discussion is most suitable for a credible discussion of experience. Recall Nancy's plight in Oliver Twist. Nancy's words of truth appear convincing only when her "manner" argues against the distrust that her physical appearance cannot help to provoke: "'your manner . . . convinces me of the truth of what you say'" (361).



In foregrounding the necessity of developing a faculty of understanding, the interview attempts to accommodate the experiences of individuals that go unrecognized because of some worldly distraction. As Dewy tells Mr. Maybold, "'We've got our feelings'" (UGT 103); and as Eustacia tells Mrs. Yeobright, "'I have a spirit as well as you. I am indignant; and so would any woman be'" (RN 265). More than simply recognizing such feelings and experiences, the interview's emphasis on the power of understanding represents an attempt to respect, appreciate, these ignored realities. Treating someone "honorably" or being treated "honorably" within the interview is often a mark of understanding. "'The fact is,' said Reuben confidentially, 'tis how you take a man'" (UGT 107). So is the penchant for speaking plainly, passionately, directly, unguardedly, and freely: "'I hope you excuse my common way,'" Dewy says, "'but I always like to look things in the face'" (UGT 100). Or the penchant for asking potentially embarrassing questions: "'Cases arise, and this is one,'" Phillotson states, "'when even ungenerous questions must be put to make false assumptions impossible, and to kill scandal'" (JO 184).

Put differently, the interview represents an effort at reconsidering how one can talk about experience that is opposed to the distracting strategies of the world. Unlike the rough and unaccommodating standards prevalent in the



world, the interview promotes a manner of discussion based on a more sympathetic and direct approach that endeavors to break through worldly distractions such as prejudices, opinions, and baseless suppositions. "There must be discussion to show how experience is to be interpreted," Mill writes in On Liberty. "Very few facts are able to tell their own story, without comments to bring out their meaning" (80). To an extent, the difference between the interview and the "outside world" constitutes a contrast between opposed forms of interpreting experience. Each arena, the "outside world" and the interview, offers its own model for interpreting experience. On the one hand, Hardy's fiction seems to privilege the strategies that the interview outlines. On the other hand, the fact that the interview is premised on withdrawing from the world suggests that the faculty of understanding that holds so many promises for an individual--recognition, accommodation, clarity of apprehension, and control over the dispossessing capabilities of language--can only be realized within an unworldly place.

Ironically, the necessity for understanding reintroduces into the experience of the individual the possibility of doubt ascribed to the world. For it is in the nature of understanding to generalize that personal experience, to take what is personally meaningful and seek out a sympathetic acknowledgement in some external source.

Recall that Dewy asked Mr. Maybold, "'I hope you see our desire is reason?'" Although Dewy is expressing a wish common to the characters within the interview--a wish to be recognized, to be heard, to exhibit one's genuine character rather than be the property of the world's opinions and expectations--Dewy's expression suggests that the experiences of the individual rely on a worldly value, the recognition of the other, to accommodate his expression. In this gesture of recognition, Dewy's personal experience loses its grounding in the authority of the individual. Understanding, in short, both preserves and defies the authority of the individual. Although this representation of understanding seems to ruin the very purpose of the interview, it might not, since such a generalization of the meaning of an individual's experience is something Hardy sought to promote. Liberated from worldly distractions, the individual would become the foundation of a reality composed of irrefutable values, whose authority is derived from the power of understanding. "Society, collectively, has neither seen what any ordinary person can see, read what every ordinary person has read, nor thought what every ordinary person has thought."<sup>12</sup> Like Jane Eyre, whose position as an outcast allows her to challenge her society's customs and conventions on her way to redefining the terms of a new social order, Hardy's individual, an outcast many times, seems to challenge the values of its society to strengthen

and ground them in the power of understanding and in sincerity.

The point of the interview, like the point of Hardy's notion of a sincere representation, is to liberate the individual from preestablished models of behavior. To do this, the conditions of the interview must be extended to society as a whole. Hardy will extend the conditions of the interview by invoking the need for a sincere representation of reality.

#### Notes

1. Jude the Obscure, 49. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation JO.

2. Nature, in the form of this breeze, operates as though it were a postal system. On several occasions in Jude and in other Hardy novels the postal system appears as an unreliable service. Consider these instances. One I have already referred to. Recall that the grammars Jude receives from Phillotson arrive in the mail. What Jude initially regards as a blessing to his fledgling academic aspirations, he inevitably discovers to be a disappointment, a "shabby trick" the dead languages play. Second, a few pages before the episode in which he translates nature's message, Jude relates an interesting anecdote that contains some fascinating references to postal practices. "Perhaps if he prayed, the wish to see Christminster might be forwarded. . . . He had read in a tract that a man who had begun to build a church, and had no money to finish it, knelt down and prayed, and the money came in by the next post. Another man tried the same experiment, and the money did not come. . . . This was not discouraging, and turning on the ladder Jude knelt on the third rung, where, resting against those above it, he prayed that the mist might rise" (40). The mist rises and he sees some "shining spots" (41) on the horizon. "It was Christminster, unquestionably; either directly seen, or miraged in the peculiar atmosphere" (41). Like the grammars forwarded to him by Phillotson, this vision of Christminster will play a trick on him.



3. See pages 53, 100, 116, and 137. During these "lapses," "trances," "dreams," Jude seems to have separated himself from the world. The separation is often initiated by some textual apparatus such as reading, books, "messages," or words. His "lapse from common-sense and custom," he reflects, "had all come of reading heathen works exclusively" (53). Sometimes the words spoken during these episodes are unintelligible to everyone but Jude. See pages 100 and 116.

4. Desperate Remedies, 67. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation DR.

5. Two on a Tower, 113. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation TT.

6. If I seem to attribute human traits to words, it is with a specific purpose in mind. First of all, I do not mean to suggest that words are living things possessing human characteristics such as agency, a life, or an unwillingness to do some things. It should be clear that I do not intend this in the way I qualify my statements with the word "almost." But what I do want to suggest in these near personifications is that the force that language and words exhibit is not reducible to a character's whims. Instead, as J. Hillis Miller has tried to argue in some of his most recent texts, that reading or language can display the properties of performatives. See Miller's The Ethics of Reading, Versions of Pygmalion, and Tropes, Parables, Performatives; the last of the three contains several essays on Hardy. Throughout Hardy's fiction and poetry, one might remember, words, letters, and books display an almost supernatural ability to bring the dead to life, to function not unlike a spiritualist medium enabling the living to communicate with the dead.

7. Under the Greenwood Tree, 98. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation UGT.

8. For a provocative analysis of the function of testimonies, see Daniel Cottom's "Wording the Subject of Spiritualism" in Abyss of Reason: Cultural Movements, Revelations, and Betrayals.

9. The Return of the Native, 268. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation RN.



10. Far from the Madding Crowd, 63. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation FMC.

11. The Mayor of Casterbridge, 241. Subsequent references to The New Wessex Edition of the novel will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation MC.

12. The Life of Thomas Hardy, 224. Subsequent references will be included in the text and designated by the abbreviation L.

CHAPTER 5  
SINCERITY

Anyhow, conscientious fiction alone it is which can excite a reflective and abiding interest in the minds of thoughtful readers of mature age, who are weary of puerile inventions and famishing for accuracy.

--Thomas Hardy, "Candour in English Fiction" 127

Well, we hardly know how to look at things in these times.

--Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd 115

He was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is really not new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then.

--Thomas Hardy, Far from the Madding Crowd 84

Hardy responds to the forces of misunderstanding within his culture by pursuing a sincere and conscientious representation of reality. In fact, he argues that one can only overcome these forces by pursuing this sort of representation. Hence, sincerity is necessary to develop one's power of understanding.

Sincerity is predicated on challenging a culture's traditional assumptions and definitions of behavior. Observation, rather than a culture's preestablished assumptions, grounds sincerity's discoveries. In order to justify these observations, Hardy will often demonstrate

that sincerity does not rely on simple or quick judgments. Instead, a sincere observer of reality always acknowledges the trouble or difficulty s/he faces in making a judgment. Essentially, a sincere observer claims to be impartial and undogmatic. But for Hardy, a sincere observer is also a moral figure. Consequently, a sincere observer derives his or her authority from a moral order and from the impartial and neutral techniques of observation s/he adopts.

These two sources of authority enable sincerity to justify its perception of a general truth. Although sincerity recognizes, appreciates individual and cultural differences, sincerity transforms these differences into individual expressions of a general truth. This truth is discovered within reality by the impartial techniques of observation that sincerity defends, even while Hardy argues that experience or the observations of a sincere observer cannot be generalized or totalized. Sympathy unites society into a seamless collective that transcends social definitions and prejudices.

#### Sincerity: The Demand to Challenge and Observe

"Thomas Hardy" and the works with which this name has been entrusted have been associated in the past few years with the word "disruption." John Goode, J. Hillis Miller, and Peter Widdowson, for instance, argue that the texts of "Thomas Hardy" often engage some of the traditions and

assumptions that underlie the prevalent social and aesthetic conventions of Hardy's era in order to dismantle them. Some critics interpret the disruption of these social and aesthetic conventions as one thematic device among a myriad of other devices pervading the novels. In fact, it is more.

Challenging these conventions proves to be indispensable to Hardy's invention of an aesthetic. Consequently, one can underestimate the complexities of Hardy's mission in contending that such a challenge indicates a formative aspect of a character's portrait, a function of a narrator's penetrating vision, or an organizing theme; instead, the act of questioning underwrites the structure of Hardy's aesthetics almost entirely. Indeed, Hardy's realization of the truth proceeds exclusively from a strict adherence to this peculiar mode of delineation and inquiry. In other words, Hardy's challenges are not a question of an isolated device but of a general practice.

According to the argument suggested by some of these critics, what Hardy disrupts in adopting this style of analysis is an ideological and political order entirely supported by dogmatic, unjust, and specious regulations. In this sense, Hardy resembles Jude Fawley, who, the morning after his wedding to Arabella Donn, "seemed to see the world with a different eye" (JO 82). And like Jude, Hardy wonders



how "ordinary notions . . . came . . . to prevail" (JO 82). While criticizing his culture's traditions and assumptions for being dogmatic, unjust, and specious, Hardy also deplores them because they are insincere and unsympathetic. A lack of sincerity on the part of conventions and morals makes them degrading. Literature, too, is beset by these problems. "The besetting sin of modern literature is," Hardy asserts, "its insincerity. Half its utterances are qualified, even contradicted, by an aside, and this particularly in morals and religion" (L 215).

What even more specifically typifies this unsympathetic order is a disrespect for social, cultural, and individual differences, where these are made the victims of a belief in a homogeneous society. Sue Bridehead recognizes this.

"I have been thinking . . . that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies." (JO 226)

Hardy also writes that "People who to one's-self are transient singularities are to themselves the permanent condition, the inevitable, the normal, the rest of mankind being to them the singularity" (L 206).

According to Hardy, the subordination of difference to some ideal unity mystifies history and culture. Concealed in the process of mystification is a tendency to legislate

the representation of truth, normalcy, and "the inevitable" without appearing to do so. Beliefs are raised to the plateau of unchallenged authorities. Virtually unassailable, like the phantasms in "Doom and She"--"None can their chronicle declare, / Nor why they be, nor whence" (CP 118)--these creations are unnoticeably integrated into a society's unconsciousness as if they have no history or beginnings. "London appears not to see itself," Hardy writes. "There is no consciousness here of where anything comes from or goes to--only that it is present" (L 206-207). Understandably, these beliefs grow to resemble religious mysteries or natural phenomena more than social inventions; in fact, they soon appear resplendent as sacred decrees, not as the sullied debris of contentious social history.

One of Hardy's primary tasks throughout his writings involves subjecting these conventions to "obstinate questionings," as Wordsworth describes it in his "Intimations of Immortality," and protesting the "treat[ment of] social conventions and contrivances--the artificial forms of life--as if they were cardinal facts" (L 213). One of the clearest statements to this effect is found in Florence Emily Hardy's The Life of Thomas Hardy.

In future, I am not going to praise things because the accumulated remarks of the ages say they are great and good, if those accumulated remarks are not based on observation. And I am not going to condemn things because a pile of accepted views raked together from tradition, and acquired by

instillation, say antecedently that they are bad.  
(161)

As one can see here, Hardy's rejection of "the accumulated remarks of the ages," and therefore of his culture's assumptions and institutions, is carefully stated. Only if an assumption or tradition conflicts with observations will Hardy reject it, or praise it. Hardy, however, does not question the desire or belief in a basis or ground. Why? Because the authority he ascribes to observations assumes that there is a ground somewhere that transcends individual or social beliefs and desires. So, while Hardy's "obstinate questionings" appear inexorable, they are not, for there is a limit to what Hardy is willing to examine.

For Hardy, the literature and social conventions of his day had one thing in common: both practice a form of subterfuge that sacrifices sincerity and candidness for an uncritical acceptance of established traditions and an unexamined belief in illusions that are comforting to some but unjust to others. One of Hardy's poems, "The Problem," delves into the conflict between these two currents.

"Better we let, then, the old view reign:  
Since there is peace in that, why decry it?  
Since there is comfort, why disdain?" (CP 120)

Despite the comfort that would be produced by assuming a posture of willful deceit, anyone professing to be a paladin of sincerity, as Hardy does, could not permit the deceit to suppress the greater demand for a truth arrived at conscientiously, sincerely: a truth based on observations.<sup>1</sup>

Then those "hurt, misrepresented names, . . . [that] cry to History / To do them justice" (CP 329) could discover in Hardy's development of a sincere and conscientious representation a forum for their grievances, a place of restitution where their stories could be written.

As one can see, the stakes are high, since nothing short of history itself would be lost if one chose to disregard the necessity of a sincere representation. In the first epigraph to this chapter, Hardy clearly confers upon a "conscientious fiction alone" the privilege to enter into a depiction of history and, by extension, the truth. For unlike the "old views" that depend upon sophistry, illusion, and distraction to be convincing, a "conscientious fiction" represents an impartial survey of things as they are, but as they are forced upon a conscientious observer by nature and by the critical, not prescriptive, nature of one's indagations. So while Hardy will write in Desperate Remedies that "there is no accounting for beliefs" (230), he will argue that his notion of a sincere and conscientious representation is warranted and necessary, for it is just.

But Hardy does not intend simply to dismantle the orthodox traditions and assumptions of his day. He is concerned with the wider problem of perceptions of all kinds, in relation to any object. When Hardy would get through with it, observing reality would be far more complicated than anyone ever thought. "Nature is an arch



dissembler," Hardy writes in The Life. "A child is deceived completely; the older members of society more or less according to their penetration; though even they seldom get to realize that nothing is as it appears" (176). Sincerity will transform the manner reality is conceptualized and the manner meaning is generated in order to transfer the authority once held by these orthodox traditions to a conscientious and sincere observer. But to declare that no transfer of power is taking place, that power is not the issue but perception, that this newly constructed site of authority is supposedly neutral and undogmatic, and that everything observed is necessarily so, i.e., obvious--Hardy would have to rest everything on a sincere and conscientious observer's superior powers of perception and circumspection. Gabriel Oak and Edmund Springrove possess these powers.

For instance, the trouble characters face in recognizing what Hardy describes as an obvious truth is meant to demonstrate the neutrality and impartiality of their positions and conclusions. As a stimulus to a provisional suspension of judgment, this trouble is more than a sign of something a character feels as insoluble or confusing. To be sure, one could feel incapacitated by "the indecision of conscious perplexity" (DR 301) that this trouble brings. However one might be pushed into a nettling state of mind, in which case one would be compelled to postpone making a judgment or reaching a conclusion, it is

important to note that what appears to weaken a character's ability to judge will also denote that his or her judgment, when delivered, is impervious to doubt.

Some characters in the novels, for instance, are so distraught by troubling misapprehensions that they beseech the help of a "guide," who, despite being buffeted by similar circumstances, escapes the pathetic crises engulfing the character who is too weak to make decisions on its own. Cytherea Graye, the narrator of Desperate Remedies states,

could dally with her perplexity, evade it, trust to time for guidance, no longer. The matter had to come to a crisis: she must once and for all choose between the dictates of her understanding and those of her heart. She longed, till her soul seemed nigh to bursting, for her lost mother's return to earth, but for one minute, that she might have tender counsel to guide her through this, her great difficulty. (254)

Bathsheba Everdene, in Far from the Madding Crowd, experiences a similar crisis, a similar "difficulty." "'I have no feeling in the matter at all. And I don't at all know what is right to do in my difficult position, and I have nobody to advise me'" (397). As a result, the narrator will distinguish between two forms of indecision: "the indecision of weakness" and "the indecision of conscious perplexity" (DR 301).

Other characters, like Aeneas Manston, respond differently to a perplexing situation. Basically, they are not troubled by what surrounds them, especially since it does not directly affect them. Doubts concerning a person's

motive, intention, utterance, etc., may surface in these instances, but these doubts eventually evaporate, since some characters do not care to regard them as troubling.

But at this hint of the lady's wish to take his wife under her wing also he was perplexed: could she have any sinister motive in doing so? But he did not allow himself to be troubled with these doubts, which only concerned his wife's happiness. (DR 191).

And there is still another response. This one, too, shows itself to be equally unaware of what ought to be recognized as troubling and thus as meaningful. Some characters, specifically those with "unsophisticated minds," are said to respond "placidly" to their surroundings; in other words, they are completely untroubled by what they see. They view as "natural" and "justifiable" what they ought to be examining critically, conscientiously. They omit to examine their surroundings because a penetrating mind's emblematic reluctance to accept upon faith what appears direct, obvious, or common is foreign to their consciousnesses.

The week passed away. The steward had, in the meantime, let it become generally known in the village that he was a married man, and by a little judicious management, sound family reasons for his past secrecy upon the subject, which were floated as adjuncts to the story, were placidly received; they seemed so natural and justifiable to the unsophisticated minds of nine-tenths of his neighbors, that curiosity in the matter, beyond a strong curiosity to see the lady's face, was well-nigh extinguished. (DR 193)

For these characters, reality manifests itself as plain and direct.

But for a conscientious observer, feeling perplexed or troubled about what he or she observes separates him or her from the common field of willful deceivers that distort the face of reality to advance their dogmatic views and from the heap of "unsophisticated minds" content to continue viewing placidly their surroundings. Also, feeling this trouble and responding to it with circumspection and conscientiousness shake loose a casual observer's confidence in a spontaneous and transparent reality, one that manifests itself as plain and direct.

As a result, Hardy's conception of reality as a place of increased complexity that challenges one's sense of things and the faculties with which one makes sense of things provides the basis for questioning the authority conferred upon conventional reasoning that shapes reality according to generalizations. The outcast--Jude Fawley, Edward Springrove, Eustacia Vye, and others--embodies this challenge. "The highest flights of the pen are mostly the excursions and revelations of souls unreconciled to life," Hardy writes, "while the natural tendency of a government would be to encourage acquiescence in life as it is" (L 240). With the aid of these questioning outcasts, a culture's ossified customs and values are challenged; and through them, the few who have "eyes to understand as well as to see" (TT 290), essential values and truths can be



culled according to an impartial and sympathetic observation of reality and experience.<sup>2</sup>

As this view of reality challenges the homogenization of experience, it also portrays these challenges as unbiased, carried out for the sake of sincerity, justice, and necessity. In fact, if an insincere regard of reality is characterized by willful deception, Hardy will occasionally contrast this willfulness with the passivity of a conscientious and sincere observer. Being passive supposedly then makes a conscientious and sincere observer submit himself to his surroundings. But this passivity is significantly different from the sort imputed to "unsophisticated minds." Induced by a critical and broad analysis of all the circumstances, a conscientious observer's conclusions then appear "forced" upon it (DR 300), strange and demanding, rather than familiar or expedient. The "sight had gone through Cytherea [Graye] like an electric shock, and there was an instantaneous awakening of perception in her, so thrilling in its presence as to be well-nigh insupportable" (DR 105).

If Hardy has something to fear to warrant depicting sincerity as the proper way to represent reality, it is the uncanny revival of dogmatism in his new approach. He is clearly aware of this problem: "It is so easy nowadays to call any force above or under the sky by the name of 'God'-- and so pass as orthodox cheaply, and fill the pocket!" (L

296). To put it differently, if truth were obvious, why must one go through so much trouble to get at it? Why is it that the falseness of the institutions and traditions he attacks is not obvious to everyone? Like Michael Henchard, someone might be wondering: "'Why had [I] not, before this, thought of what was only too obvious?'" (MC 307).

To paraphrase what Hardy and his characters continuously utter, nothing is simple, or easy. There is "'no accounting for beliefs'" (DR 230). Superstitious practices could unwittingly comprehend an obvious truth, rumors could inexplicably coincide with a truth conscientiously observed, and casual conjectures could easily substitute for a serious examination--so how is one to defend the propriety of any approach to truth without resorting to sophistry, rationalizations, occultation, or threats?<sup>3</sup>

Hardy offers an answer. "Adherence to a course with persistence sufficient to ensure success is possible to widely appreciative minds only" (DR 80). The figure of a "widely appreciative mind" (that is, a conscientious observer) would consolidate the authority of a sincere representation by reconciling respect, equanimity, moral fortitude, and conscientiousness with an improved sense of understanding, apprehension, inquiry, and critical thought. Any discourse that fell outside of these recognized parameters would be reputed to be unreliable, morally

questionable, a prisoner of unconsciousness, or weighed down by prejudices and opinions.

For Hardy, there would be no contradiction in equating morality, propriety and critical thinking, the enforcement of certain values with an impartial observation of reality. One need only look at some of Hardy's contemporaries--particularly those who held that middle-class morality was interwoven essentially into the formal and universal structure of reason, such as Eliot and Mill--to see just how this collusion could appear as a compelling truth. Granted, Hardy is not a rationalist; in fact, he would often criticize a view of reality based on the model of reason and logical coherence.

For all of this, however, there are moments in Hardy's literature where he appears to recapitulate the desire, if not the form, he deplores among rationalists--the desire to couple morality to a seemingly transcendent and impartial procedure of observation. Moral strength and propriety would announce one's developed understanding and impartiality, as with Edmund Springrove and Gabriel Oak. Someone not in possession of these two elements could be ignored or, even worse, relegated to an anonymous existence. "'Tis barren ignorance that leads to such [erroneous] words,'" Buzzford states, addressing Farfrae. "'[Solomon Longways's] a simple home-spun man, that never was fit for good company--think nothing of him, sir'" (MC 85).

In the absence of a rational basis for truth, in "a world where nothing bears out in practice what it promises" (L 155), Hardy would strive to develop an aesthetics of sincerity that would also be a decorous procedure for sorting out a vital truth from its forgeries, messengers of sincerity from their impostures, respectable inquiries from abrasive intrusions. But try though he might to dissolve the historical bases of the question of morality by integrating it into the question of an improved sense of understanding and impartiality, or turning morality into sympathy, Hardy's acknowledgment of reckless or impolite inquiries and of unmeditated judgments would return the search for an impartial mode of understanding to a question of propriety and thus to the issue of values. For Hardy, one must meditate on the consequences of one's judgments; one must be responsible for what he or she says and does. Swithin St. Cleeve, the narrator of Two on a Tower states, "was endowed with that schoolboy temperament which does not see, or at least consider with much curiosity, the effect of a given scheme upon others than himself" (255).

Although admitting such things as impolite and reckless inquiries into the defense of his own analysis would make Hardy's case more compelling, the contrast he relies on to advance the grounding of morality in a neutral and impartial analysis would also engender an opposite effect. By suspending one's judgment, one demonstrates a conscientious



attitude that releases one from a culture's prejudices and assumptions. But this release also improves one morally, since one becomes attentive to the feelings of others. What J. S. Mill says in the following passage can also apply to Hardy.

The human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminating feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference are exercised only in making a choice. He who does anything because it is the custom makes no choice. He gains no practice either in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular, powers are improved only by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by doing a thing merely because others do it, no more than by believing a thing only because others believe it. (OL 122)

Hence, the neutrality that would create a critical distance, which Hardy could then use to discover a latent unity that binds individuals more forcibly than any artificial social bond, is here articulated as a difference of values: what is proper. Being impartial or neutral certainly forced one to adopt some procedures that would subdue the passions of prejudice and opinion. But being impartial and neutral also forced one to embody certain maxims, such as respect, patience, selflessness, sympathy, and conscientiousness. "The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshot respect by being barely comprehended" by Eustacia (RN 176).

Hardy suggests, then, that the formal aspects of impartiality and neutrality are not convincing in and of themselves; what they promise to disclose, i.e., a proven

understanding of some event, could often be disclosed by a less strenuous route. In light of this, an additional but inseparable appeal to propriety as a source of intercession could invalidate those forms of knowledge that would not adhere to the propriety (patience, responsibility, respect) of a sincere and conscientious approach to truth. For J. S. Mill, whose descriptions of "the only stable foundation for a just reliance"<sup>4</sup> on one's opinions resemble Hardy's own descriptions of a sincere approach to truth, the sort of person one is is just as important as adopting the proper approach to truth (OL 78-79, 122-23).

For Hardy's notion of sincerity and its procedures to appear compelling, then, they would have to appear indispensable--necessary--to the elucidation of an obvious truth. They acquire this aspect of indispensability in part from an image of reality as one of confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, and duplicity. Like the image of social crisis discussed in chapter one, this image also idealizes the system of social or historical differences circulating in and giving rise to social or cultural variants by drawing it as a state of indeterminacy and disarticulation: all is uncertainty in Hardy's fictional world. Reality would appear as a provoking jumble to a sincere and conscientious observer because it could then seem as if it were offering itself up to be shaped, articulated.

But Hardy's occasionally antagonistic exchange with his critics underscores just how questionable this newly acquired shape might appear to some readers. He could be accused of fashioning an illegitimate or arbitrary representation of reality. To obviate these accusations or others like them, Hardy, or a sincere and conscientious observer, would have to argue that, though seeming new, this newly acquired shape is not new, i.e., an invention. Instead, its shape, like Hardy's notion of an obvious truth, which he states is always there waiting to be discovered, could be shown to be inevitable and not coercive. It is "clear to anyone who could read it" (MC 197). As a result, Hardy could rescue his notion of an obvious truth from a commercial existence, from a differentiated determination, where it could always assume a new value and identity beyond what any individual or any context struggled to limit it to. His writings, as Hardy writes in "The Science of Fiction," engage a truth "more truthful than truth" (134), a universal value that embraces but also overcomes regional differences in aspiring to fulfill "the just aim of Art" (134).

If in these discussions I appear to refer to the concept of the "individual" as a coherent entity, that is not the intent. The interest in discussing Hardy's notions of a "widely appreciative mind" and a "conscientious observer" is to examine how Hardy's literature endeavors to

imagine, define, and delimit the constitutive parts of an "individual." Moral and ethical designations such as responsibility, conscientiousness, probity, and circumspection often operate with this purpose in mind. All of the values that cluster around Hardy's image of an "individual" are then not adventitious characteristics that can be appended to or removed without altering the integrity of some core entity, but an indisposable set of values that gives rise to the figure of an "individual."

Thus, while Hardy's "obstinate questionings" mean to challenge seemingly sacred conventions, they also mean to feed the hunger for accuracy and sincerity within "thoughtful readers of mature age." A critical, reflective predisposition would be required to fulfill this objective--a character capable of rising above the distractions of ordinary society: "I often view society-gatherings, people in the street, in a room, or elsewhere," Hardy explains, "as if they were beings in a somnambulistic state, making their motions automatically--not realizing what they mean" (L 184).

So the disruptive impulse that some critics attribute to Hardy's texts is inseparable from a quest for sincerity, accuracy, candidness, and frankness--for a truth that is "waiting to be discovered by any penetrating mind" (TT 57). One just has to realize what is going on, Hardy's narrators routinely exhort.



Even the failure to tell the truth would not be a defeat as long as one was "conscientious." "[C]onscientious and well-intentioned authors . . . , notwithstanding their excesses, errors, and rickety theories, attempt to narrate the verite vraie" ("The Science of Fiction" 136). Failure could actually appear as a victory. Some failures might also be encouraging. "Critics can never be made to understand that the failure may be greater than the success" (L 333-34). "I too believe in Byron," Hardy writes to Roden Noel, "though less in what he says, than in what he struggles to say, yet cannot" (CL 1: 262). On his pessimism, Hardy writes, it "is the only view of life in which you can never be disappointed" (L 311).

There are, then, many sides to Hardy. Fiercely disdainful of metaphysical principles, consistent philosophies, and dogmas, Hardy also would seek out a "higher truth" that is irreducible to any specific philosophy or any historical contingency. Promoting himself as an agent of enlightened understanding who would inculcate in his readers a sympathetic appreciation and tolerance for life's diversity, he exhibits an ardent intolerance, or condescending wonder, for readers who criticize him for authoring morally or politically heterodox ideas, or readers who fail to understand him because of their own failures to discard their prejudices and take him for their "guide." He wants his works, therefore, to be read as

fiction and as truth, just as he states that although his art is not representative of realist aesthetics, it watches over reality with an acumen unmatched by the best optics realism conceives.

In "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Hardy argues that realism's faith in a truthful representation of reality is contradicted by its necessity of imagining the impossible, which is the possibility of a world completely enclosed by the imagination. Nonetheless, he seeks to convert the impossibility that jeopardizes realism's claims to truth into what valorizes his own conception of a sincere representation of reality. He writes: "By a sincere school of Fiction we may understand a Fiction that expresses truly the views of life prevalent in its time" ("Candour in English Fiction" 126). Hence, Hardy's sincere representation joins truth and fiction promiscuously, mixes failure and success in its endeavor to work through the impossibility of completely representing reality. Even while this impossibility would limit Hardy's representation of reality--like the sense of difficulty and trouble that awaits anyone searching for an obvious truth--it manifests the reality Hardy is aiming toward. Like Diggory Venn, the Reddleman in The Return of the Native, Hardy "seemed to look upon a certain mass of disappointment as the natural preface to all realizations, without which preface they would give cause for alarm" (108). Therefore, the limit to the

representation of reality is an expression of reality. Hardy's fiction could claim to have its origin in a truthful representation of reality while immersed in the impossibility of it all.

Hardy's sincere representation of reality aspires toward the apprehension of a truth that other approaches disregard, skitter over, or routinely incorporate into preexisting models of truth and preestablished responses devoid of any respect for the uncommon, for experience in general. It takes issue with every commonly-held orthodoxy; more to the point, it spurns commonness, finding it the equivalent of recklessness and dimness of mind. Hence, Hardy would write: "Experience unteaches--(what one at first thinks to be the rule in events)" (L 176).

As a rule, Hardy contends, commonplace notions are substantively at odds with reality. Unlike the unmediated observation of events Hardy assumes would materialize if experience were left to itself, these commonplace notions are fashioned from an imaginary figuration of events that occurs in advance of encountering the real events they are reputedly based on. Typically, speculation rather than observation governs one's understanding of events. Displaced from reality by this speculation, events are infused with an imaginary significance and coherence. "[T]hinking is causing" in some circumstances, the narrator of Two on a Tower states (145).

Yet even as Hardy sketches the prefiguring of events in this speculative manner, he himself cannot do without such speculation. That is, Hardy asserts the value of experience ("Experience unteaches") from a premise that contradicts itself. This statement leaves no room for the unmediated experience that it demands. Perhaps it is not surprising that this maneuver is expressed here parenthetically, as if to say that it must be quarantined from Hardy's text even while its presence is vital to that text.

Hardy's conception of experience must invoke a "false" representation of reality in order to deny it. Yet even as he denies it as false, he cannot dispense with it in assisting to insure the credibility of his own position.

#### When Techniques Replace the Authority of Providence

In Hardy's fiction, the shape of reality is being recast, and to complement the changes to this surface, Hardy is also engaged in transforming how one ought to refer to it, look at it, think about it. The feelings of perplexity, uncertainty, and bewilderment that vex characters such as Michael Henchard, Farmer Boldwood, Jude Fawley, and Swithin St Cleeve, upon discovering that their faculties of understanding the world around them are unreliable, illustrate these transformations. "How suddenly the truth dawned on [Swithin]; how it bewildered him, till he scarcely knew where he was" (TT 111); "'How strangely knowledge comes



to us,'" Cytherea Graye observes (DR 71). And as the passage on Cytherea Graye forecasts, one's conventional view of language, experience, behavior, reality, understanding, and observation is being questioned; and as it is being questioned, Hardy is rearranging it and, thus, disputing its authority. In short, how one partitions the occasion for understanding, significance, and knowledge is being rethought. "'Well, we hardly know how to look at things in these times!'" Solomon Longways says (MC 115). But looking at a thing in this or that fashion is not the only problem, as Solomon says. Knowing how to look is a different matter, and so is knowing what looking involves, not to mention knowing what "things" now will come to signify, refer to, and knowing how they will be meaningful or not, and for whom such things will bear the weight or lightness of meaning (for example, this "we"), and at what times (at the end of one's life, at night, during an interview, after the fact, when one is educated). After all, Hardy writes, in what may be one of the clearest "definitions" of a sincere mode of representation:

What cannot be discerned by eye and ear, what may be apprehended only by the mental tactility that comes from a sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all of its manifestations, this is the gift which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature than many another with twice his powers and means of external observation, but without that sympathy. ("The Science of Fiction" 137)

Furthermore, when properly and responsibly undertaken, a sincere mode of representation would "show more clearly the features that matter . . . , which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked" (L 229).

Both of these passages might be stating the same thing, making a similar case against the competence of a specific technique of observation. Yet as the doors open in the second passage to admit a broader possibility of observing "the features that matter," the first passage closes them tightly (more so than the second), relieving everyone except the "possessor" of a "sympathetic appreciativeness for life" of the means to apprehend these features. He alone knows how to look. One can take the consequences of what Hardy implies further and say that apprehension, understanding, etc., are impossible to everyone save for the "possessor" of a "sympathetic appreciativeness of life." That is to say, a sincere and conscientious observer.

Upon the disappearance of some traditional centers of authority, such as providence and the aristocracy, new sources emerge in the form of a method of analysis, a tone of inquiry, or a technique of apprehension that can arrest the dissemination of meaning that is both a pretext and a barrier to the recovery of an obvious truth.

Existence is either ordered in a certain way, or it is not so ordered, and conjectures which harmonize best with experience are removed above all comparison with other conjectures which do not

so harmonize. So that to say one view is worse than other views without proving it erroneous implies the possibility of a false view being better or more expedient than a true view; and no pragmatic proppings can make that idolum specus stand on its feet, for it postulates a prescience denied to humanity. ("General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912")

Unlike the faith prescribed by providential and aristocratic authority, the faith in these new sources of appeal can be transmuted, rationalized, into appearing as an experimentally confirmed necessity. The merit of these techniques will be proven against experience. If someone is to avoid succumbing to the misunderstandings, deceptions, disorientation, or moral liability awaiting anyone who might be lured by the expectation of "an instant meaning" (FMC 50), he or she must adopt these techniques. Bathsheba

suddenly felt a longing to speak to some one stronger than herself, and so get strength to sustain her surmised position with dignity and her carking doubts with stoicism. Where could she find such a friend? . . . Patience and suspension of judgment for a few hours were what she wanted to learn, and there was nobody to teach her. (FMC 321)

Everything that Hardy imputes to a "casual observer," to someone like Swithin St. Cleeve on occasion--a show of carelessness, a tendency to simplify and generalize, a faith in plain and direct meanings or plain and direct communication, a disregard for critical thinking--is gradually being examined, disputed, and substituted by these new procedures of sincerity. Recognizing that the world is a strange place is insufficient. Swithin, for instance,

"was one who suddenly finds the world a stranger place than he thought; but is excluded by age, temperament, and situation from being much more than an astonished spectator of its strangeness" (TT 277-78). Consequently, procedures would have to be developed to engender a "confident ease of mind which is required for the critical observation of surrounding objects" (DR 92).

When Hardy criticizes his culture for drifting about unconsciously, routinely enacting their traditions, and employing uncritically the forms that give sense to their world and actions, he is trying to communicate how his culture is being held captive by its words, concepts, and practices. In this way, he might be seen as echoing a few words from the Preface to The German Ideology. "They, the creators, have bowed down before their creations. Let us liberate them from the chimeras, the ideas, dogmas, imaginary beings under the yoke of which they are pining away" (Preface 37).

In imagining a world wherein meaning is ambiguous, a world looking for a conscientious and sincere figure with "a confident ease of mind" to interpret it, however, Hardy is capitalizing on an ambiguity he himself designs.

To be sure, Hardy acknowledges the proliferation of meanings and the differentiation of values that could dispossess a character of its identity or position (DR 292, 314), render the reception of its intentions uncertain, and



demonstrate how one could be carried away by opinion (TT 113). But in acknowledging these distractions, Hardy also tries to recuperate them, to turn them to his advantage in order to show the necessity of a sincere representation.

Why the particulars of a young lady's presence at a very mediocre performance were prevented from dropping into the oblivion which their intrinsic insignificance would naturally have involved--why they were remembered and individualized by herself and others through after years--was simply that she unknowingly stood, as it were, upon the extreme posterior edge of a tract in her life, in which the real meaning of Taking Thought had never been known. It was the last hour of experience she ever enjoyed with a mind entirely free from the knowledge of that labyrinth into which she stepped immediately afterwards--to continue a perplexed course along its mazes for the greater portion of twenty-nine subsequent months. (DR 45)

Or to show the necessity of his theory of sympathetic interpretation and the necessity of a conscientious observer. Only then can one be just. Cytherea Graye states:

"And perhaps, far in time to come, when I am dead and gone, some other's accent, or some other's song, or thought, like an old one of mine, will carry them back to what I used to say, and hurt their hearts a little that they blamed me so soon. And they will pause just for an instant, and give a sigh to me, and think, 'Poor girl!' believing they do great justice to my memory by this. But they will never, never realize that it was my single opportunity of existence, as well as of doing my duty, which they are regarding; they will not feel that what to them is but a thought, easily held in those two words of pity, 'Poor girl!' was a whole life to me; as full of hours, minutes, and peculiar minutes, of hopes and dreads, smiles, whisperings, tears, as theirs: that it was my world, what is to them their world, and they in that life of mine, however much I cared for them, only as the thought I seem to them to be. Nobody can enter into another's

nature truly, that's what is so grievous." (DR 273)

It is important to recognize, for instance, that Hardy describes the effect on this world precipitated by the erosion of the traditional sources of authority based in providence and the aristocracy as the creation of uncertainty; recall that he writes, "a world where all's unsure" (MC 212). Hardy also claims that it is a world of distractions, unrealized actions and attitudes, of easy familiarity, of forlorn consciousness. These descriptions are not insignificant. They enable Hardy to reinscribe the proliferation and differentiation of values, ideas, truths, interpretations, and perspectives into a hierarchical structure, where ignorance, clumsiness, unconsciousness, recklessness, casualness, and familiarity need to be overcome. Difference takes on meaning as it is recognized as the negative value of sophistication, seriousness, morality, circumspection, and appreciation.

Hence, sincerity cannot acknowledge what disrupts the identity, neutrality, or ground of its values and conceptions, what forces it to recognize the conflictual nature of values, identities, perception, experience, institutions, and language. Therefore, Hardy defines sincerity in opposition to an imagined antithesis, not a competing perspective. Or when perspectives are multiplied, it is with the intent to expose their

simplicity, their satisfaction with a "simple solution," and their confounding circumstantial evidence for direct.

The steward had fetched home his wife in the most matter-of-fact way a few days earlier, walking round the village with her the very next morning--at once putting an end, by this simple solution, to all the riddling inquiries and surmises that were rank in the village and its neighbourhood. Some men said that this woman was as far inferior to Cytherea as earth to heaven; others, older and sager, thought Manston better off with such a wife than he would have been with one of Cytherea's impulses, and inexperience in household management. All felt their curiosity dying out of them. It was the same in Carriford as in other parts of the world--immediately circumstantial evidence became exchanged for direct, the loungers in the court yawned, gave a final survey, and turned away to a subject which would afford more scope for speculation. (DR 309)

The ability to judge, and therefore to know and understand, is identified with sincerity. Only sincerity is certain about what it does; only sincerity is just. This certainty is what gives sincerity its advantage over an alternative form of understanding or judging. If sincerity were to lose this advantage, rather, if the truth sincerity purports to speak were shown to be nothing more than a question of having an advantage, which would make truth a prejudice, as Nietzsche asserts, sincerity would be quite a different thing. "Unskilled labour wastes in beating against the bars ten times the energy exerted by the practised hand in the effective direction" (DR 349). Truth itself as a basis of authority, then, would not suffice to distinguish one form of understanding or one technique from another: superstition from critical analysis, intuition from

circumspection, speculation from observation, projection from deduction, "a confident ease of mind" from the "hallucinations of an idiot," frivolity from seriousness, faith from reason, and gossip from respectful inquiry. Truth would be an effect of some belief; the belief in the necessity of a sincere and conscientious representation.

The world of Hardy's novels--one characterized by distraction, uncertainty, ambiguity--also has something to say about the relation between the novels' narrators and their characters. One, for instance, might stick to a conventional interpretation of this relationship, where the characters are marked by a narrowness of vision and the narrators by a wide view, a type of omniscience or critical detachment. According to this very familiar outline, one would find that the narrators in Hardy's novels often occupy a privileged position of observation and interpretation, one acquired through the novels' more intimate acquaintance of the significance of events, actions, and motives. At the same time, one would find that access to this plane of omniscience is denied to Hardy's characters because of some empirical, metaphysical, psychological, or historical predicament that destines them to an incomplete or obfuscated understanding of their world. Like lissome spirits (to borrow an image Hardy used to describe his activity as an author entering the homes of his readers), Hardy's narrators float through history and across society



to record in the capacious book of Time an intricate and thorough account of the lives of the characters thus observed. They record from their exalted realm above the world of distractions, ambiguities, and uncertainties what ineluctably recedes before the eyes of unconsciously acting characters. The implication is that if one can rub away those idiosyncratic descriptions of the social world as a place essentially composed of distractions and unconsciously acting characters, which appear as secondary phenomena, one might arrive at a purified and primary knowledge of things.

This is the more usual procedure in reading Hardy: to rub away these supposedly secondary additions to what is presumed to be the basic structure of an omniscient narrator. However, omniscience may be a term misapplied to Hardy's narrators to begin with, since Hardy's prefaces contain various disclaimers to any assertion of complete, coherent knowledge. More important, to ignore these supposedly secondary phenomena is to suppress the terms according to which this narrative design must operate if it is to achieve any significance. It is to overlook, for instance, the way the novels arrange a variety of interpretations around events as a way to disqualify some interpretations as unsophisticated, mystifying, or relative and offer different ones in their place; provide procedures for distinguishing "good" and "bad" interpretations; differentiate between reflective and unsophisticated

characters-readers; and plot the relationship between the narrator's often critical view and a character's narrow vision. In other words, to accept the contrast between omniscience and narrowness of vision amounts to deemphasizing the interdependence of these representations, an interdependence that subverts the notion of omniscience.

The narrator's position does not mark the upper limit of the text, although it does mark the demand for critical limits and hierarchies. If the relationship between the narrator and character is a competitive one, the narrator's perspective might be read not as superior to a character's but as its difference, though a difference that may seem superior because it is reflective, sophisticated, sincere, sympathetic, or inquiring. This point should serve as a caution against the assumption that the forms of knowledge and understanding represented in Desperate Remedies or Two on a Tower or Jude the Obscure can be analyzed down to some primary level, at which they would be obvious or independent of further examination.

While Hardy's claims to "sincerity" should be questioned for their fidelity to truth, their historical accuracy, their formal coherence, and the efficacy of their principles, they also should be questioned textually. In addition to asking whether one can rely on such language, one should consider what kind of language this is and how this kind of language defines what we will assume

"understanding" or "knowledge" to be in Hardy's texts, essays, poems, or letters--"terrible," "strange," "bewildering," "circumstantial," or parapractic.

For example, the difference between Hardy's sincere mode of representation and an alternative mode that "merely copie[s] or report[s] inventorially" appears as a difference in aptitudes rather than truths, a difference in degrees rather than in kind. Unlike a representation that "might possibly" observe this vital truth, a sincere and conscientious representation is more likely, more assured, of observing this truth because of its superior lucidity, an aptitude. Thus, when Hardy encounters opposition to his sincere representation of reality he can silence it by arguing that the difference composing the opposition is superficial and not substantive, a difference in aptitude and not a battle between languages contesting the identity of truth, reality, or experience. By interpreting his opposition here as a weak or callow instance of his own perfected lucidity, Hardy can neutralize the effect it would otherwise engender and cause him to lose his voice. That effect is the uncomfortable revelation that sincerity and the figure of a widely appreciative mind or a conscientious observer collaborate to institute restrictions on the access to this supposedly obvious truth: restrictions that simultaneously deny imposing any restrictions on the acquisition of truth, privileged techniques that refute

their privileged role. Put differently, a sincere and conscientious observer is not smarter than other people. Instead, a sincere and conscientious observer claims to have found a means of releasing itself from its culture's prejudices and distractions. And having done so, a sincere and conscientious observer can articulate the experiences of the inhabitants of this world with greater certainty, experiences which the world's inhabitants could only state clumsily, imperfectly, not ignorantly. Therefore, it can profess to be just, appreciative, not superior.

#### Sympathetic Appreciation

Hardy's theory of sympathetic interpretation is key to this discussion. For as this theory purports to nurture an appreciation and understanding for uncommon behaviors, experiences, and beliefs, it also aims toward transcending them, locating in the realm of sympathy an ideal form of unity and identity that exceeds the relativity of conventional definitions and classifications.

Social definitions are all made relatively: an absolute datum is only imagined. The small gentry about Knapwater seemed unpracticed to Miss Aldclyffe, Miss Aldclyffe herself seemed unpracticed to Mr Nyttleton's experienced old eyes. (DR 137)

A theory of sympathetic interpretation would endeavor to reverse all the "errors" associated with "thinking that you are right yourself because you are yourself, and other people wrong because they are not you" (L 165).



Anyone familiar with nineteenth-century literature might not be surprised to discover that this notion of sympathy appears in Hardy's texts. It has a long tradition in the literature of this period and shows up in the writings of such luminaries as Thomas Carlyle, J. S. Mill, George Eliot, and others back at least to William Wordsworth. Although it would be premature to argue that all of these writers attribute the same significance to the notion of sympathy, there are some basic overlappings.

Typically, sympathy figures prominently in an intensive assault on "artificial" and "arbitrary" theories, maxims, formulas, dogmas, and systems. Each of these constructs exhibits the characteristic of "narrowness," which entices one toward synthesizing differences into manageable and constraining generalizations. As the narrator of Eliot's The Mill on the Floss states: "the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment only by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method" (435). Within this tradition of interpretation, as readers of Eliot, Carlyle, Wordsworth, and Mill know, a universalizing basis in sympathy and "fellow-feeling" supplants the allegedly accidental authority of those artificial and arbitrary rules that display an impatience, an unappreciation, as Hardy would state, with a wider field of sentiments. Sympathetic attachments are supposed to

unite social beings by "enlarging" the scope of vision otherwise truncated by narrow theories, dogmas, general rules, and maxims. But in the case of Hardy, one finds that as the narrowness of arbitrary and artificial definitions is reformed and supposedly replaced by a sincerity alert to heterogeneity, to diverse expressions and unaccountable motivations, to contradictory impulses and unfamiliar sources of knowledge, the enlarged scope of vision contracts into itself, reestablishing irreversibly the primacy of a narrowed ground that not only connects diverse quarters of society and individuals but also acts as an uncodifiable basis of truth. Sympathy may even function as an unconscious expression of solicitude, as when Anne Seaway demonstrates a most unusual feeling of sympathy. The narrator of Desperate Remedies explains.

Many of these women who own to no moral code show considerable magnanimity when they see people in trouble. To act right simply because it is one's duty is proper; but a good action which is the result of no law of reflection shines more than any. (388)

A sincere representation of reality relies on a "sympathetic appreciativeness of life" for its justification, for more justice, or for the "just aim of Art," which is to apprehend what is "more truthful than truth."

According to this theory of sympathetic interpretation, something approaching a seamless cohesiveness between otherwise disparate and unequal consciousnesses that

hitherto could not face each other in an unmediated setting ensues. In this way sympathetic attachments attempt to transcend virtually any socially and economically instituted barrier, the pitfalls of egoism and prejudices, and the narrowness of conventional morality by presupposing a shared experience of suffering that leads to the evolution of a form of understanding that displays an "appreciative sense of all the circumstances" (DR 66). Thus, the narrator of Far from the Madding Crowd observes that "the severe schooling she had been subjected to had made Bathsheba much more considerate than she had formerly been of the feelings of others" (358). Sympathy marks a "rebellion against . . . prejudices" (FMC 320). Likewise, a "sympathetic attitude" induces Viviette Constantine to "ris[e] above self-love."

To counsel her activities by her understanding, rather than by her emotions as usual, was hard work for a tender woman; but she strove hard, and made advance. The self-centred attitude natural to one in her situation was becoming displaced by the sympathetic attitude, which, though it had to be artificially fostered at first, gave her, by degrees, a certain sweet sense that she was rising above self-love. (TT 244)

More important, sympathy and the understanding that comes of it deserve one's highest respect because it is through them that "changes in a life" occur, since through them seemingly incongruous perspectives can be harmonized. Referring to Swithin St. Cleeve's astronomical experiments, the narrator of Two on a Tower notes:

In these experiments with tubes and glasses, important as they were to human intellect, there

was little food for the sympathetic instincts which create the changes in a life. That which is the foreground and measuring base of one perspective draught may be the vanishing-point of another perspective draught, while they are both draughts of the same thing. (281)

Shortly after taking a position as Cytherea Aldclyffe's handmaid, Cytherea Graye is visited late at night in her room by her employer, who asks Graye to let her enter. Graye acquiesces only after reflecting on the awkwardness of the request. The narrator states: "The young woman passed in a conflict between judgment and emotion. It was now mistress and maid no longer; woman and woman only. Yes, she must let her come in, poor thing" (DR 112). The rules of social stratification that define and divide one Cytherea from the other as "mistress" and "maid" are here, at night and removed from the scrutiny of the world, momentarily shelved in favor of a different rule, which enables this socially and economically disjointed pair to commune on a seemingly more immediate level as "women."

#### The Rejection of Closure in Sincerity

Consequently, if it is to abstain from repeating the errors of its reductive and totalizing predecessors, the truth that a sincere mode of representation discovers could not be codified into a systematic body of knowledge. Otherwise, experience could be homogenized, generalized. Its authenticity as an accurate delineator of reality's heterogeneous nature would rely on its denial of closure,



in fact, on an account of truth that is at once imaginary and empirical, without an enduring form and yet based on reality. Hence, Hardy would state that his writings simply document his "impressions." Distinguished from what Hardy would see as realism's fanatical and naive attempt to canvass everything under the sun, a sincere approach to reality would make a more humble promise. A sincere observer recognizes that copying the minute details of daily life and the variegated levels of experience can never reach a point of saturation, because there is no limit to the available details and to the possibility of experiences. For Hardy, closure signifies more than an encyclopedic comprehension of every aspect of reality. As Hardy asserts, closure arises from the subordination of some experiences. "Admitting the desirability, [there remains] the impossibility of reproducing in its entirety the phantasmagoria of experience with infinite and atomic truth, without shadow, relevancy, or subordination" ("The Science of Fiction" 135). Therefore, Hardy states in the last paragraph of his Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912: "The more written the more seems to remain to be written." The boundaries of the truth that a sincere representation communicates would always have to remain indeterminate, ceaselessly open, perhaps like the moment in Two on a Tower in which a usually invasive narrator suggests that both Viviette Constantine and the narrator itself cannot know

what are Viviette's reasons for acting in a particular way.

She became much absorbed in these womanly reflections; and at last Lady Constantine sighed, perhaps she herself did not exactly know. . . . What whim, agitation, or attraction prompted the impulse, nobody knows; but she took the scissors and, bending over the sleeping youth, cut off one of the curls. (68)

As the following passage from Desperate Remedies illustrates, a truth that would be clear to a sincere observer would, to someone less penetrating, always risk being fossilized in the language of existing conventions.

Nobody indoors guessed from her countenance and bearing that her heart was near to breaking with the intensity of the misery which gnawed there. At these times a woman does not faint, or weep, or scream, as she will in the moment of sudden shocks. When lanced by a mental agony of such refined and special torture that it is indescribable by men's words, she moves about her acquaintances much as before, and contrives so to cast her actions in the old moulds that she is only considered to be rather duller than usual. (278)

In Two on a Tower, the narrator seems to wonder whether even a penetrating observer can peer into a character's nature.

It might have been apparent to a more penetrating eye than the vicar's that Lady Constantine, either from timidity, misgiving, or reconviction, had swerved from her intended communication, or perhaps decided to begin at the other end. (50)

In fact, an individual's labile nature renders most attempts at categorizing it difficult. (Hardy here repeats a familiar topos--the unknowable woman, woman as the unknowable.)

But an attempt to gain a view of [Cytherea]--or indeed of any fascinating woman--from a measured category, is as difficult as to appreciate the

effect of a landscape by exploring it at night with a lantern--or of a chord of music by piping the notes in succession. (DR 44-45)

In addition, a sincere representation is inimical to dogmatism, most disciplines of knowledge, and any political conviction. For Hardy, they are counterproductive to the stability of an impartial observation of the facts. Political neutrality, as Hardy states, is essential to his position as an artist. Countless letters point to his insistence that no artist can ally himself with a political party and not compromise his artistic creations. "[M]y views of the rural classes," he wrote in a letter to Alfred Austin, editor of the National Review, "are entirely sympathetic, & non-political" (CL 1: 258). Absolute impartiality presumably liberates one from the messy business of opinions, prejudices, convictions, and egoism--"those temporary currents . . . by which town people are caught up & distracted out of their true courses" (CL 1: 190)--that would contaminate aesthetic purity and representational authority. Instead, a sincere representation, declaring itself to be based on "self-proof and obviousness," would trust in nothing that would leave reality "wrapped up" in opinions, arguments, and views to interfere with anyone's ability to grasp the obvious truth ("Profitable Reading of Fiction" 114). Derwent May, who has written the Introduction to the New Wessex Edition of The Return of the Native, seems to bear this vision out, for

he states: "[The Return of the Native] is a far more plainly intelligible book than some of the commentators have been prepared to admit--and the published criticism of it is full of curious feats of fantasy and wilful blindness" (13).

Truth is plain and obvious because it presumably is not confined to a particular class, watched over by a group of specialists, made the property of a determined medium, or the province of a single individual. Hence Hardy's criticism of egoism as the limits of evoking this truth. Anne Seaway's doubts about her conclusions are exemplary, as when the narrator says: "Was, then, the only solution to the riddle that Anne could discern, the true one?" (DR 370).

Hardy's persistent emphasis on a character's "impressions" participates in this criticism. Including himself in the criticism, Hardy occasionally attributes to his writing an unconscious suggestive power. In other words, the meaning imparted to a word is not logically bound to the utterances of a subject, to his intentions. "[T]he words in which a thought [is] expressed develop a further thought" (TT 54). In addition, Hardy regularly expresses his regret over the fact that he can never bring to fruition what he had imagined to write before putting pen to paper. And when he did, he would find more value in the tentative and cloutish first drafts of a manuscript than in the polished completed version.



The yearning toward a totality is further impeded by what Hardy determines as the reason for telling a story. A writer, he states, "must not occupy a reader's time with what he can get at first hand anywhere around him" (L 362). In fact, how the narrator of Two on a Tower describes Swithin's astronomy lessons to Viviette might also describe Hardy's relationship to his readers as he endeavors to convey the sort of truth he regards as obvious while rejecting the enticement to offer a totalizing picture of life. "By figures of speech and apt comparisons he took her mind into leading-strings, compelling her to follow him into wildernesses of which she had never in her life even realized the existence" (58). Hardy will often turn to this image of an unknown world to depict the limits of opinions and prejudices.

#### The Gift of Intuition

Recall that Hardy states that when properly employed by a penetrating and conscientious observer, sincerity would endow one with a "mental tactility . . . which renders its possessor a more accurate delineator of human nature" ("The Science of Fiction" 137). But deprived of this spectacular "gift" (137), one could not recognize the truth of truth, as Hardy describes it in his essay, "The Science of Fiction." "[B]eing more truthful than truth [is] the just aim of Art" (134).

If an unpracticed observer did recognize this truth without the help of this "gift," however, this observer would have done it accidentally, unconsciously, clumsily, perhaps even illegitimately. These accidental and unconscious recognitions would say at least one thing about this unpracticed observer: s/he remained for the most part and most of the time captivated by distractions and only broke with them provisionally and dumbly, not being equipped with the special powers of analysis and observation that a conscientious observer could summon to understand what s/he saw and thus prevent him- or herself (and the truth discovered) from relapsing into a state of distraction. An unpracticed observer's clumsiness makes him or her something of a "child" in the way s/he relates to this truth, a metaphor Hardy uses intermittently to describe the sort of character briefly released from a state of distraction to gain a flitting look at this truth.

An unpracticed observer might not have been tutored in the use of a conscientious observer's procedures of analysis, and ignorance of this ilk might have impaired his or her ability to recognize an obvious truth through the few acknowledged and dignified channels that would carry one confidently toward this truth. Yet the accidental acquisition of an obvious truth by an unpracticed observer suggests that these disciplined escorts could be unnecessary, disposable. Such an observer could sight this

truth without the imprimatur of justness or the authority of circumspection that supposedly proclaim the legitimacy of this truth. Recognizing this truth accidentally, or differently, he or she suggests how the delineation of this truth does not necessarily rely on these forms to be acquired, that these forms are arbitrary, not necessary.

The way this truth appeared, how it was presented and represented to the world, therefore, could not be divorced from its revelation. Its shape or articulation is thus scarcely insignificant or superfluous to its manifestation. On the one hand, Hardy could not turn the matter of articulating an obvious truth into a specialized activity without forcing one to question the assertion that this truth is obvious, provided one knows how to acquire it. But on the other hand, neither could he allow accidental or unconscious acquisitions of this truth to be exchanged for his disciplined and penetrating procedures. Since for Hardy the aim of Art is to be just in its delineations, it would need to be well-founded. Hence, the means invoked to acquire it could very easily invalidate what is revealed, even if this truth were accessed. As a result, the appearance of an obvious truth mattered very dearly to the appearing of an obvious truth.

In some cases, notably in The Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbridge, this concern over the shape or articulation of what one wants to communicate centers around

a discussion of conveying something imperfectly or "dumbly."  
 "Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape" (RN 196); and recall that Donald Farfrae "was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then" (MC 84).

A "gift," Hardy writes, describing the faculty of apprehension that distinguishes someone with a sympathetic appreciativeness for life. But from whom? And why this designation? And conferred on what kind of subject? By what authority? "[M]etaphor," Derrida writes in "Force and Signification," "is never innocent. It orients research and fixes results" (17). Because this metaphor underwrites several key topics--the power of penetration, the aim of Art, the delineation of human nature, truth--its significance cannot be overestimated. It is not then innocent, though it pretends to be so because it is a "gift," potentially natural, as when one says, for example, "My, she is gifted." Hence, it is not unusual that Hardy activates, perhaps not innocently, an image of innocence and nature, ignorance and heart, when he wants to depict the spectacular properties of this "gift." Education, class, privilege, gender, truth, sympathy, and sincerity are some



of the issues (in)directly addressed in this passage on the "intuitive power" (137) that "supplies a power of observation."

[A] needy and illiterate woman, though she could probably neither read nor write, had the true means towards the "Science" of Fiction innate within her; a power of observation informed by a living heart. Had she been trained in the technicalities, she might have fashioned her view of mortality with good effect. ("Science of Fiction" 138)

"[A] power of observation informed by a living heart" is the gift given. This faculty of observation, which is the gift, is the thing given; it is the thing (an object) given in an act of giving (an activity). Succinctly, the gift is the gift: that which comes to someone and the activity of coming: a "power of observation" and its engenderment. What comes is so in the coming. Thus, because this "gift" of penetration can potentially come, or not come, to anyone, it can even come to a most unlikely beneficiary, a "needy and illiterate woman." It is fortuitous rather than willed, mysteriously bestowed and acquired rather than organized and instituted. Mysterious, the gift and what it brings seem unquestionable. Because the means of gaining access to a truth more true than truth is legitimized as a "gift," it is not the product of education (like those "technicalities"), class, value systems, differences, conflicts. Because of all of this, Hardy's notion of a sincere representation, as well as the questions of observation and of truth, apparently are

empowered by an imaginary authority divorced of any ties to power or invention or historical authority.

Ironically, even as this faculty celebrates its cryptic origins, it stands out as the most sophisticated form of observing the "vital qualities" in reality. As it retreats from the forms and relations generally identified with social existence, just as Hardy admits that he had to flee the noise and distractions of London to write lucidly and penetratingly about social life, this faculty of apprehension sharpens its capacity to understand the world it forsakes. Clarity of vision, truth, justice, and accuracy--in effect what Hardy alleges is not possible to attain when he tries to write in the midst of the confusion and unconsciousness that lances the inhabitants of London--would come to anyone possessing this faculty. The comfort and tranquility of being isolated from fractious value systems that enable Hardy to develop his own gift for clarity of vision and penetration are of a kind with the conditions said to trail the gift of "intuitive power." Mrs Yeobright, in The Return of the Native, benefits from this gift, too.

She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticize, have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things. . . . In the social sphere these gifted ones are mostly women; they can watch a world which they never saw, and estimate forces of which they have only heard. We call it intuition. (RN 212)

Something also needs to be said about the location--the last paragraph--of this passage about a "needy and illiterate woman" in Hardy's essay, where, because of its location, one might be tempted to confer upon it the symbolic status of "the last word." What makes this concluding passage especially intriguing is that it appears some four paragraphs after Hardy confesses that it is difficult to define in a positive form what this "science" is. He will say, instead, what it is not. "Being an observative responsiveness to everything within the cycle of the suns that has to do with actual life, it is easier to say what it is not than to categorise its summa genera" (136-137). A few paragraphs intervene, then a fictional scene takes over, in which the reader finds the above-mentioned portrait of a "needy and illiterate woman." This fictional scene will attempt to do what the preceding paragraphs could only do negatively--define this "science."

Yet the definition proffered in the fictional scene is flitting, allusive, a compact illustration rather than a meticulous or rigorous explanation of this concept. "That speaker," we read, "was one who, though she could probably neither read nor write, had the true means towards the 'Science' of Fiction innate within her." Because we are given an illustration of someone who has "the true means towards" this thing, we are promised a glimpse of it. The means themselves are never specified. Rather than saying

what the means are, Hardy asserts that so and so has them, a stylistic incident consistent with the thesis that this paragraph is pressing toward--the incalculable definition of the concept "science." While the preceding paragraphs do not reveal the substance of this thing but only what it is not, this fictional scene provides the occasion for grasping both the meaning of the concept, the Science of Fiction, as well as the means toward it, the means of grasping it, the means of representation. One learns about representation from an example of representation; consequently, there is nothing but representation. Both of these things, the meaning of the concept and the means toward it, both of which reflect on the issue of representation, are themselves caught up in the problem of their own representation. What we grasp is conveyed in a fictional setting, in an illustration, that passes on the substance of this concept via an example, in other words, indirectly, insubstantively, as the quotation marks framing the concept in this passage alert: "the true means toward the 'Science' of Fiction."

On the one hand, this indirect grasp is necessary, for, as Hardy writes earlier, "an attempt to set forth the Science of Fiction in calculable pages is futility; it is to write a whole library of human philosophy, with instructions how to feel" (138). The Science of Fiction is, so to speak, "incalculable." On the other hand, it is showable, but only in fiction. Not only does fiction disclose the true means



toward the Science of Fiction, it discloses these means as fiction, as metaphor: in fiction one defines the "true means," the truth.

This is precisely how Hardy often views the approach to his elusive, obvious truth: an approach conducted indirectly and metaphorically, producing "by a false thing the effect of a true," giving "for that which cannot be reproduced a something else which shall have upon the spectator an approximate effect to that of the real" (L 216). The purpose is to thwart the temptation to totalize or essentialize this truth, experience, or reality, to convert them into the property of a select few or to consecrate them.

Fiction, then, precedes truth, is what enables truth to be illustrated; but without the definition of truth that helps define fiction, fiction itself cannot be calculated, identified, substantivized. Fiction is before truth, but also before itself. This passage illustrates, then, the fiction of truth and the fiction of fiction: the incalculable.

#### A General Truth is Difficult to Grasp

Consequently, Hardy states in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction":

Narrative art is neither mature in its artistic aspect, nor in its ethical or philosophical aspect; neither in form nor in substance. To me, at least, the difficulties of perfect

presentation in both these kinds appear of such magnitude that the utmost which each generation can be expected to do is add one or two strokes toward a selection and shaping of a possible ultimate perfection. (116)

The difficulties written into the structure of sincerity and a conscientious fiction are designed to deter conscientious observers from the sort of movement that casts Cytherea Graye's anguish in "old moulds," in familiar and therefore unreliably facile patterns. A letter to Edward Clodd acknowledges this sort of difficulty and portrays it as a need to investigate a different world, an image that enables Hardy to cite the inadequacies and illusions inherent in unexamined assumptions that feel assured in their capacity to provide a general and precalculated explanation of reality. Referring to Clodd's Tom Tit Tot, Hardy writes:

It incidentally shows, too, what often occurs to me down here, how vast & striking is the body of unwritten human experience in this so-called literary age. It is necessary only to become familiar with the outlying cottagers of a remote district to be let into this subterranean world of impressions, fancies, & knowledge. However, there is some difficulty in becoming thus familiar. (CL 2: 202)

Or when Swithin St. Cleeve admonishes Lady Viviette Constantine: "'No person can see exactly what and where another's horizon is'" (TT 70). Consider the following as well: "It would have been difficult to judge from her accents whether she was afraid to broach her own matter, or really interested in his" (TT 57); and "these vivid

realizations are difficult to tell in slow verbiage" (TT 111).

But like the laborers Hardy writes about in "The Dorsetshire Labourer," in which Hardy states "that happiness will find her last refuge on earth, since it is among [the laborers] that a perfect insight into the conditions of existence will be longest postponed" (169), there are those who fail to realize the error of their deluded view of things. This error denies them the means of adjusting their views to coincide truthfully with the existing state of things. For instance, unlike a conscientious observer, the "casual" observer occasionally referred to in Two on a Tower and Desperate Remedies fails to realize the difficulty of which Hardy writes. Because the "casual" observer clings to the security that "old moulds" furnish, he or she continues uninitiated into the fact that "Nature does few things directly" (DR 201), or that "Nature is an arch-dissembler" (L 176). He or she then fails to realize that becoming familiar with the true face of what is routinely fashioned to corroborate common, general, or unexamined assumptions is a challenging assignment--replete with bewildering, puzzling, and startling encounters that erode the assurances of an unsophisticated mind.

Hardy's insistent petition for a penetrating and inquiring mind--identified with impartiality, patience, training, and seriousness--is in itself another statement of

the difficult task a conscientious observer is beset with if he is concerned with portraying accurately the dimensions of reality. Edward Springrove, for instance, writes a letter "after the decision he had come to on an impartial, and on that account torturing, survey of his own, his father's, his cousin Adelaide's, and what he believed to be Cytherea's, position" (DR 238).

There is an enormous value associated with the identification of this difficulty. One value is in marking the difference between a conscientious and a casual observer, between a sincere mode of representation and a deluded one. More important, the element of difficulty functions to legitimate the authority of a conscientious observer and a sincere representation and to dismiss the authority of what opposes itself to the work of these figures of truth. What does not accede to the course that a sincere and conscientious approach lays out is characterized as irresponsible, unconscious, and clumsy. "[I]t is easy to be smart and amusing if a man will forgo veracity and sincerity," Hardy writes (L 246). Recall the following as well: "It is so easy nowadays to call any force above or under the sky by the name of 'God'" (L 296). And less conspicuously: "'Nobody else has taken the trouble to prove what does not affect them in the least--that's the way of the world always'" (DR 355). Without the element of difficulty, historical consciousness would quickly be



overcome by prejudices or nescience: "There is no consciousness here of where anything comes from or goes to--only that it is present" (L 207). Or a character's nature would be haphazardly evaluated, a procedure that would display an observer's indifference to exactitude and his or her servile compliance with stock deductions. In "The Peace Peal," Hardy writes,

"So mortal motives are misread,  
And false designs attributed,  
In upper spheres of straws and sticks,  
Or lower, of pens and politics." (CP 798)

Thus, the difficulty that constitutes becoming familiar with something is less an insurmountable obstacle than a means of certifying one's credibility and impartiality, the authenticity of one's representation of life, and the foundation of one's authority in a historical consciousness. It guarantees that one will not be misled by initial impressions, superficial details, misguided judgments, unexamined assumptions, or, as Hardy writes in "In the Seventies," "the chillings of misprision" (CP 459). The following passage from Desperate Remedies presents a very subtle illustration of these many but interconnected issues.

Adherence to a course with persistence sufficient to ensure success is possible to widely appreciative minds only when there is also found in them a power--commonplace in its nature, but rare in such combination--the power of assuming to conviction that in the outlying paths which appear so much more brilliant than their own, there are bitternesses equally great--unperceived simply on account of their remoteness. (80)

One of the most peculiar aspects about this phenomenon is that a penetrating mind can transcend the local barriers of conventional reasoning--interpreting them as "clumsy," "appearances," "wrappings," or "distractions," generally disparaging them as unrealized errors--by, paradoxically, cultivating a sympathetic appreciativeness for life that makes one sensitively aware of social, cultural, gender, or individual differences. The paradoxical reasoning is crucial. Disposing of the paradox would mean that a conscientious observer could not outrun the far-reaching arms of conventional reasoning, which, according to Hardy's logic, is never anything more than a belief system disguised as a cardinal fact. The paradox lies in the fact that the process of apprehending the many values and meanings circulating throughout social life recognizes these differences in order to transmute them. Their existence is necessary to the elaboration of a universal ground rooted in and derived from real events. And unlike the misguided and credulous predecessors of a sincere representation that blot out cultural differences willy nilly, these differences are deduced "by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism" (CP 557). Only after a thorough examination of reality has been performed does a sincere representation discover beyond these superficial differences the existence

of a meaning that is more significant than these local ones because it transcends the circumstantial and often disputed boundaries that compose this heterogeneous field. Behind these differences that separate disparate parties, values, and beliefs lies a stratum of identity that unites them into an undifferentiated whole.

According to Hardy, as I have pointed out earlier, this unity usually evades detection because of a misunderstanding, a mistake in judgment predicated on the false view that because some group or idea is different, because it exceeds one's range of apprehension, it does not exist. As the narrator of Desperate Remedies states: it is "unperceived simply on account of [its] remoteness" (80). Hence Hardy writes, "You feel how entirely the difference of their ideas from yours is of the nature of misunderstanding" (L 235). A misunderstanding also accounts for the failure of individuals to know each other (L 177).

Once compared to an encounter with a strange and perplexing world, difference loses its ability to be incorporated when thus represented. It exchanges its "remoteness" for redundancy, because its resistance to apprehension is imagined as nothing more than a misunderstood relationship that can be corrected, an unrealized error easily righted, not an intractable difference that eludes every endeavor to assimilate and, thus, efface it. "Every error under the sun seems to arise

from thinking that you are right yourself because you are yourself, and other people wrong because they are not you" (L 165). Historical and social differences are affirmed to be negated, evoked to be denounced as accidental. Historical differences can always be understood, incorporated, that is, mastered and sublated into a larger unity where their historical identity is a partial realization of a greater, more meaningful identity in some fully realized unity. Hardy states that the "whole secret of fiction and the drama--in the constructional part--lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal" (L 252). This adjustment involves a transfiguration of what is historically particular; and as Nietzsche has argued, this sort of transfiguration is tantamount to synthesizing or generalizing experience, to rendering familiar through a synthesizing understanding what is aggressively foreign. In short, adjusting "things unusual to things eternal and universal" expresses a dissatisfaction with the world and a desire for fleeing it.

In a letter to John Addington Symonds, Hardy writes:

I often begin a story with the intention of making it brighter and gayer than usual; but the question of conscience soon comes in; and it does not seem right, even in the novels, to wilfully belie one's own views. . . . A question which used to trouble me was whether we ought to write sad stories, considering how much sadness there is in the world already. But of late I have come to the conclusion that, the first step towards cure of, or even relief from, any disease being to understand it, the study of tragedy in fiction may possibly here and there be the means of showing



how to escape the worst forms of it, at least, in real life. (CL 1: 190)

The interpretation of historical differences Hardy implies, like the attention to the "difficulty" surrounding an accurate observation of reality and character, both of which are inscribed with some sense of "remoteness," is essential to Hardy's desire to demonstrate his sincere regard of history and facts. All of these metaphorical terms constitute the standards according to which historical authenticity is measured and an ideal unity sanctioned by history.

Recall a passage from The Mayor of Casterbridge that details the steps of the transmutation.

Casterbridge had sentiment--Casterbridge had romance; but this stranger's [Donald Farfrae] sentiment was of differing quality. Or rather, perhaps, the difference was mainly superficial; he was to them like the poet of a new school who takes his contemporaries by storm; who is not really new, but is the first to articulate what all his listeners have felt, though but dumbly till then. (84).

Difference is recognized, swiftly interpreted as superficial, and then nullified as it is transformed into a hierarchy where one side is burdened with an inability to know itself and with silence, the other with the capacity to understand matters better than anyone else and thus to try to monitor the dispersion of meaning. "How often we see a vital truth," Hardy writes, "flung about carelessly wrapt in a commonplace subject, without the slightest conception on

the speaker's part that his words contain an unmeshed treasure" (L 48).

The above passages suggest how, when the remote unity binding these differences is penetrated and apprehended "by the exploration of reality" rather than superimposed upon reality through a force of habit or tradition that fails to test the accuracy or sincerity of these habits and traditions, the source of this transcendent value can be shown to reside in empirical fact, not in conventions, traditions, fantasies, or "the illusory path of speculation" (DR 48).

In future, I am not going to praise things because the accumulated remarks of ages say they are great and good, if those accumulated remarks are not based on observation. And I am not going to condemn things because a pile of accepted views raked together from tradition, and acquired by instillation, say antecedently that they are bad.  
(L 161)

This practice will then allow Hardy to declare both that, although some barriers to establishing a seamless unity are stubbornly unavoidable, they also can be made to dissolve when critically inspected by a penetrating mind that uncovers an unrealized general truth that transcends the historical specificity of these barriers.

All of this can be accomplished without abandoning one's commitment to historical accuracy, which thereby assures oneself that because "Facts better their foredeeming" (CP 279), facts faithfully observed can be translated into morality, ideology, or truth. So too can a

sincere mode of representation transcend what it describes as unbreachable, for example: "the battle-field of life" (DR 86), in which interpretations and values strive for individual mastery and control; the "blunder of misrepresentation" and misunderstanding (MC 243); "the coarse meshes of language" (FMC 58), which can seize control of one's intentions and suggest countless unanticipated interpretations or readings, and which can leave a writer baffled over how "his old thought was lost to him" (CP 865).

"[A] maxim glibly repeated from childhood," the narrator of The Mayor of Casterbridge explains, "remains practically unmarked till some mature experience enforces it" (167). It is no accident that in this passage Hardy uses developmental terms like "childhood" and "mature" to underscore the contrast between maxims "glibly repeated" and maxims tested against experience. While the function of these terms could pertain to the way they portray the difference between unadjusted and adjusted assumptions, unexamined and examined values, they have an even more important function insofar as they define the conditions of this contrast in terms of empty and meaningful assertions, significant and insignificant statements. Consequently, the accuracy of a maxim, statement, or assumption, its capacity to rhyme with experience, is not the only issue here. Whether a maxim, statement, or assumption is meaningful, whether it is significant, and under what conditions it

becomes so, could be cited as the focus of this contrast between the terms "childhood" and "mature." Generally, throughout Hardy's texts the contrast between a penetrating and casual observer, between examined and unexamined values, between intelligent and "warped" readers, between local and general truths, between prejudice and sincerity, will be organized in terms resembling the contrast between "childhood" and "mature" experience. In fact, if the supposedly obvious truth that a sincere mode of representation endeavors to delineate is to keep its clarity and aura of universality, Hardy would suggest that what differs with and from the obvious "Babbled unchecked in the busy way / Of witless things" (CP 429).

The point of a sincere mode of representation is not to disregard the existence of different cultures, values, and meanings; instead, it is to respect these differences while it transforms them into depositories of some universal value or meaning. A short paragraph from the General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912 conveys this point.

[T]hough the people in most of the novels and in much of the shorter verses are dwellers in a province bounded on the north by the Thames, on the south by the English Channel, on the east by a line running from the Hayling Island to Windsor Forest, and on the west by the Cornish coast, they were meant to be typically and essentially those of any and every place . . . beings in whose hearts and minds that which is apparently local should be really universal.

For that matter, even the concept of sympathy, which in Hardy's texts means in part to punctuate the need for



observing an individual as an individual removed from any social classification likely to define him or her in the most general terms, works against its own premise; sympathy requires a breakdown of the insular nature of the individual to allow other individuals to join in an activity of commiseration.

This sympathetic appreciation of historical and cultural differences is what distinguishes a sincere representation from its formulaic predecessors, even though both orders conspire to impose universal values as they synthesize cultural and historical differences. Like its formulaic predecessors, a sincere representation could demonstrate that universal values underlie these local differences, but they could now be described and justified as the products of thoughtful and careful examination, not mystified beliefs or unassailed judgments. "Unadjusted impressions have their value," Hardy writes in the preface to his Poems of the Past and the Present, "and the road to a true philosophy of life seems to lie in humbly recording diverse readings of its phenomena as they are forced upon us by chance and change" (CP 84). As Hardy states in this passage, "the road to a true philosophy of life" is premised on what is "forced" upon him, and others, "by change and chance." One humbles himself or herself before this force; one defers to this force. As a result, what Hardy discovers seems enshrined in mystery and therefore almost assumes the

aura of an unquestioned authority. "An ideal that wants to prevail or assert itself seeks to support itself," Nietzsche writes in The Will to Power, "by the thrill of mystery, as if a power that cannot be questioned spoke through it" (188). In Two on a Tower, Viviette Constantine responds somewhat in this way when she realizes "a state of things that she had never anticipated" (257). "[F]or a moment," the narrator states, "the discovery of her condition so overwhelmed her that she thought she must die outright" (257).

Without this distinction, a sincere representation would appear to be no more sincere than its predecessors even as it alleges to offer an accurate representation of life and as it adjures to reject the promise of a comprehensive view. It would be accused of making the same general assertions and the same formulaic judgments. Consequently, the process of apprehending historical differences that distinguishes a sincere representation from its rival forms of representation must depend on the power of circumspection that a sympathetic appreciativeness of life presupposes if it is going to appear more reliable, conscientious, aware, and accurate than existing forms of representing the world.

Hardy, therefore, never claims to be doing anything more than giving a true delineation of nature and society, of an obvious truth. And yet he also rejects the assumption

that some comprehensive view of life can be mapped in this delineation. In other words, the delineation of truth cannot be thought separately from Hardy's notion of a sympathetic appreciativeness of life. For Hardy, the representation of this obvious truth is unthinkable outside of a sincere representation, outside of the sensitivity that characterizes a conscientious figure, including Hardy himself. "[S]ensitiveness," one reads in The Life, "was one of Hardy's chief characteristics, and without it his poems would never have been written, nor, indeed, the greatest of his novels" (415). If Hardy's poems and novels could not have been written without "sensitiveness," the truth these novels and poems are vehicles of would not have been expressed truly. As a result, access to this truth is restricted, for it is "waiting to be discovered by any penetrating mind" (TT 57). And yet openly available, freely open to anyone willing to cultivate such an aptitude.

### Critical Responses

At the beginning of this chapter I proposed that some of Hardy's most recent readers see Hardy's texts as "disrupting" some of the prevalent literary and social conventions of the nineteenth century. They study the effects produced by the language of Hardy's texts, their formal and organizational resources, the bald or bold self-consciousness of some works as fictional contraptions, and

the tensions and contradictions that appear to defy systematic explication. These studies eventually conclude that Hardy's writings, in regard to theme and formal accomplishments, transform a culture's paradigms and voices of authority.

I do not dispute this conclusion. Yet, as I have tried to demonstrate throughout this chapter, Hardy's critical analysis and dismantling of these paradigms and voices of authority have been undertaken in an attempt to foster accuracy and to fulfill the just aim of art. The aim is, as I have stated, to discover an obvious truth, a truth that is in general more true than any particular manifestation of truth. Hardy questions traditional orthodoxies and unexamined assumptions to show more clearly the realities that matter and to unsheathe the vital qualities within the world. This aspect of Hardy's writings is more than overlooked by the readers who find in Hardy's "obstinate questionings" an assault on traditional orthodoxies and unexamined assumptions. Instead, these readers may be reproducing and exalting Hardy's program, confounding its potential for conservatism with a rejection of authority.

To say that this reading of Hardy inflects most of the criticism of Hardy's texts would be stupid. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, writes about a divided Hardy marked by two contrary impulses. Hardy's poetry, Miller argues, repeatedly dramatizes these two contrary impulses. Because



these impulses are mutually exclusive, they present an intractable dilemma to those readings of Hardy's writings that would try to sequester Hardy within an essentialist framework. "[T]he penchant toward reason and cause in Hardy's thought," Miller writes, "is constantly countered by a contrary penchant toward seeing the world as the arena of endless discontinuity" (The Linguistic Moment 305). He goes on to explain that these contrapuntal tendencies constitute a form of "unreason." "One form of unreason in Hardy's work is the co-presence of these two impulses, nostalgia for the old metaphysical way of thinking along with the need to testify that this experience offers no firm support for such thinking--far from it" (305-306).

Whereas Miller identifies in Hardy's texts "the co-presence" of two contrary impulses that graduates into a "form of un-reason," John Goode identifies "a continuous dialectic" (Thomas Hardy: The Offensive Truth 14). Apparently informed by a quasi-Derridean emphasis on "writing," Goode argues that writing immerses Hardy in a project of cultural intervention. In this project, the "disruptive presence" (3) of writing can transform a culture's paradigms and voices of authority and dislodge them from their traditional terms and boundaries of understanding. Hardy's writings reinscribe these paradigms and voices within a different field of significance. By reinscribing them, they are transformed. Thus, the status

of inevitability or normalcy that institutional or cultural forces attribute to these paradigms is refuted. Their authority is then not only rendered doubtful; it is also denounced as illusory.

All of this, Goode argues, can be traced to an array of formal effects. More specifically, however, Goode states that "a continuous dialectic in which meanings are always cancelled by opposing possibilities" (14) energizes Hardy's program of disruption. Yet on several levels, what Goode describes here resembles Hardy's desire for an enlightened form of analysis that, although recognizing the negation of a totalizing perspective, regards its own effort as just, proper, neutral, and the least encumbered by doubt and contentiousness. This process of "cancelling out" is already encoded in Hardy's defense of perspectivism, which functions throughout the novels in relation to the hypersensitive awareness of a conscientious observer. That is why Hardy portrays the presence of a conscientious observer and a conscientious fiction as necessary to the revelation of an obvious truth. This "continuous dialectic," then, does not interfere with Hardy's dream of an uncontested truth; this dream is in fact premised by the cancelling out of meanings by "opposing possibilities." Moreover, some meanings in Hardy's writings are not exactly opposed or cancelled; some are not even recognized as such, as Hardy's intolerance for "warped" readers illustrates, or

some are recognized as imperfect or distorted views to be opposed by superior states of consciousness or morality. In short, Hardy treats some views as meaningless. As a result, Goode's position either idealizes the relationship between opposing meanings, or it recapitulates the rhetoric of Hardy's dream of sincerity.

Peter Widdowson, in Thomas Hardy: A Study in Literary Sociology, argues that Hardy's textual effects challenge the limits and constraints, the narrowness, of the expectations of realist representations and of the humanist worldview supporting them. He states that this worldview, which endorses the notion of a unified subject and consciousness who thrives as the locus of meaning in an anthropocentric universe, is challenged when Hardy's "anti-realist" strategies of writing expose the "fictionality of fiction" (74). One of these fictions is the aesthetics of realism. Unlike the more arguably "fanciful" forms of literary representation, such as romance, melodrama, the pastoral, and so on, realism (according to Widdowson) is distinguished by a fastidious concealment of its identity as fiction. He argues that Hardy's formal practices carefully uncover this concealment by attacking some of the most sacred tenets of realism: order, coherence, a unified subject, the plenitude of meaning, and probability. "This process of demystifying the practices and deceits of realist narrative," Widdowson writes, "destabilizes the realist myth as a whole" (74).

The questions put to Goode are equally valid here. However, I wish to propose only one at this time: on the question of fiction in Hardy's writings. In saying that Hardy's "anti-realist" strategies expose the "fictionality of fiction," Widdowson is ostensibly underscoring Hardy's dispute with the promise of realism to provide a comprehensive and empirically objective representation of reality. But Hardy's disagreement with the tenets of realism is motivated as well by the promise of sincerity and the truth that is peculiar to it, that elusively obvious truth. Exposing the "fictionality of fiction," in other words, poses very little resistance to the acquisition of this truth. To maintain its democratic availability and to discourage codification or dogmatic pronouncements, the representation of this truth does more than acknowledge the importance of fiction in its cause. It proclaims this affair loudly, explaining that this truth could often only be approached indirectly and metaphorically. That is, by a penetrating mind.

Widdowson's analysis comes perhaps closest to reproducing Hardy's rhetoric of sincerity where Widdowson almost suggests that Hardy is a better realist than the ones with which Hardy quarrels.

Consider, for instance, the following extrapolations. First of all, Widdowson associates Hardy's "anti-realist modes" of writing with a process of demystification.



"Hardy's work, in other words, may be seen to propose the limits of fictional realism for depicting the real social forces, pressures, contradictions, and exploitations within which individuals actually live out their lives" (74). This reading of Hardy is replicated in Widdowson's own mode of analysis, in how he interprets Hardy's writings. "[I]t also offers an arena in which to combat and demystify other related critical, cultural, and ideological practices" (6).

According to this interpretation, ideological encrustations, like the sedimentation of traditional beliefs and assumptions handed down through time, fall away like scales when viewed with a critical, penetrating eye. The focus of this demystifying process is to bring things, either the real or some distilled referent, into focus. As a result, there is a revelatory function to the demystifying process. Then, an unmarred image of the importunate truth of social and cultural dynamics supposedly appears. In some ways, this recalls the purpose of Hardy's "obstinate questionings," a pursuit he clearly derived at least in theory from Wordsworth. In his "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," Wordsworth writes that because one is a

"Creature  
Moving about in worlds not realised . . .  
those obstinate questionings  
Of sense and outward things,  
Fallings from us, vanishings,"

empower us in such a way that we can lift ourselves out of a distracted existence and prepare the way for "truths that wake." Therefore, what Widdowson attributes to Hardy's "anti-realist modes" of representation--the capacity for "depicting the real social forces, pressures, contradictions, and exploitations within which individuals actually live"--corresponds to something else that Wordsworth states, which could easily apply to Hardy's conscientious fiction: "We see into the life of things" ("Tintern Abbey").

The similarity between Hardy's sincere representation of reality and Widdowson's reading of Hardy's works as being composed of demystifying processes emerges in the following definition of art that Hardy offers.

Art is a disproportioning--(i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion)--of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art. (L 229)

Clearly, Hardy's attempt "to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities" is reproduced in Widdowson's own description of Hardy's works, which he describes as "depicting the real social forces . . . within which individuals actually live out their lives." More than reproducing Hardy's definition of art, Widdowson's interpretation exalts Hardy's project, and in doing so, Widdowson uncritically perpetuates the rhetoric of

sincerity and therefore its terms, oppositions, and its intent to turn the observation of real events into the basis of a neutral and universal truth.

### Notes

1. "One argument used by Catholic friends of mine," Hardy writes in a letter to Henry Symonds, "I always consider to have weight: the wisdom of accepting certain formulae without question, and of assuming them to be true, for the sake of the calm such a process affords; or, to put it brutally, (which of course they do not), a fool's paradise is better than none. This position is intelligible, and its advantages can be recognized. There is little doubt that to know the truth in some matters lessens happiness. But the fact of a thing being unpleasant does not make it untrue, even if scepticism in transcendental matters should be one of these things. I should say that, upon the whole, whatever may be true, is best known, and not disguised" (CL 3: 157).

2. Of course, these characters often discover that their world is unsympathetic or unappreciative of their gifts. Unlike their world, these characters, which are few, possess the faculty of understanding that penetrates worldly distractions. "That the Unconscious Will of the Universe is growing aware of Itself I believe I may claim as my own idea solely--at which I arrived by reflecting that what has already taken place in fractions of the Whole (i.e. so much of the world as has become conscious) is likely to take place in the Mass; and there being no Will outside of the Mass--that is, the Universe--the whole Will becomes conscious thereby; and ultimately, it is to be hoped, sympathetic" (CL 3: 255).

3. On the significance of the various forms of knowledge in Jude the Obscure, for instance, see Christine Brooke-Rose's "Ill Wit and Sick Tragedy: Jude the Obscure."

4. "The steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinions by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation for a just reliance on it; . . . knowing that he has sought for objections and difficulties instead of avoiding them, and has shut out no light which can be thrown upon the subject from any quarter--he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process" (OL 80).

CHAPTER 6  
REFLECTIVE AND WARPED READERS

But one cannot choose one's readers.  
--Thomas Hardy The Life 271

And no doubt there can be more in a book than the author consciously puts there, which will help either to its profit or to its disadvantage as the case may be.  
--Thomas Hardy, "Postscript," Jude the Obscure 26

Hardy's writings often dwell on the act of reading. In the fictional world of Hardy's novels, characters are repeatedly involved in a process of reading their surroundings and other characters. Whether one is a clumsy or a masterful reader inevitably affects a character's future, social position, degree of understanding, identity, or safety.

In addition to thematizing the act of reading in his fictional writings, Hardy frequently addresses the subject in his essays and letters. When the subject of reading appears in his letters, many times it surfaces in the context of Hardy's response to his readers' criticisms and misreadings of his writings. Generally, he regards these criticisms as unfounded and repudiates them. But his letters reveal more. Hardy consistently writes in his



letters that he could never quite comprehend why his readers, rather, why some of his readers would criticize his writings, and do so with so much unaccountable or unwarranted irritation. Why these readers should find such strange or unintended meanings in his writings is beyond Hardy. They must surely be terrible and inattentive readers.

A skeptical or questioning reader might find Hardy's response to these readers a little suspicious or disingenuous. In professing to be unable to comprehend this unsupported reaction from his readers, Hardy could be seen as trying to disown something his writings either deliberately or accidentally suggest. He is being evasive. But, as the second epigraph to this chapter states, Hardy admits that any book possesses the power to suggest "more . . . than the author consciously puts there." Such a statement might also be no less disingenuous than Hardy's response to these readers. For such a power can become a means of disculpating Hardy from almost anything that his readers object to.

Hardy's response, then, demands a cautious reading. It demands a cautious reading because, even though one is justified in treating his response skeptically, seeing it as a ruse that is meant to discourage certain readings, Hardy's response also constitutes, if only obliquely, a statement about his writings. Deprecating these readers, in other

words, Hardy implies a certain belief about his writings and, just as importantly, about his readers.

Hardy's epistolary skirmishes with certain readers suggests that what a sincere and conscientious representation of reality claims to offer, a view of the "vital qualities" that matter in reality and a truth "waiting to be discovered," might not evoke universal approval. To preserve the results of a sincere representation from refutation, to anchor these results even while Hardy says that his writings lack authority, Hardy must insist on having a reflective reader; otherwise, readers--which have been distracted from these realities by their prejudices and unrealized assumptions--will be incapable of comprehending Hardy's distortions of reality, distortions which extract from the world of customs and accidental truths a universal and permanent truth. Only by having a reflective reader can the meaning of Hardy's writings seem obvious, plain, and justified. Without this necessary reader, Hardy's representation of reality would appear based on some unjustified authority, coercive and peremptory, arbitrary rather than neutral, prescriptive rather than descriptive, a belief in a necessity rather than a product of sincere observation. Hardy's writings, then, require "sentient seers," "thoughtful and mature readers."

Just as the interview cultivates a faculty of understanding that will enable characters to communicate

directly, plainly, and freely as individuals, and therefore liberate them from their bondage to worldly distractions, one of the functions of Hardy's writings is to guide readers toward acquiring a similar faculty of understanding. The novels train the reader how to apprehend the vital realities that a sincere representation discovers. They function as manuals aimed at educating the public, as grammars (perhaps like Jude's) that "guide" the reader away from familiar but distracting habits that tend to condense experience and apprehension to ready-made formulas. They guide the reader toward a more refined method of appreciation, one rooted in circumspection.

Hardy himself makes this point. In several letters, for instance, Hardy sees himself as "educating" the British public when he writes his novels, poetry, essays, even his letters. For he recognizes, even while he regrets it, that writing in general is from the start a public affair. In one letter to Millicent Fawcett, Hardy writes:

You may say the treatment hitherto [of love and its corruption] has been vague and general only, which is quite true. Possibly on that account nobody has profited greatly by such works. To do the thing well there should be no mincing of matters, and all details should be clear and directly given. This I fear the British public would not stand just now; though, to be sure, we are educating it by degrees. (CL 1: 264)

And as Hardy suggests in another letter, one to A. M. Broadly (who wrote a review of Hardy's The Dynasts), the value of writing depends largely on the existence of a

particular type of reader, one who is "alert" or reflective.

Hardy states:

[I]f one could reckon on the alert receptivity (either with approval or without) of the mind behind this article, in a few more readers, what a different colour an author's life would wear! However, I cannot complain of the reviews of this Second Part, though some of them were rough on the first. I suppose, like Disraeli, I am educating my party. (CL 3: 199)

These letters reveal that part of Hardy's craft as an author encompasses the production of an uncommon reader. The references to educating his public presuppose the existence of an emergent reader, someone to be born, hence nonexistent as yet. In fact, Hardy would define himself as a literary reincarnation of the Ancient Mariner, that bedraggled traveler and teacher who directs an inexorable story toward a prescribed audience that must listen to his account, an account that suppresses the will of its audience to refuse the story, to object to its hold on the listener.<sup>1</sup> In short, Hardy, like the Mariner, is forcing his reader to become wiser. "Unfortunately," Hardy writes to F. W. Maitland, "readers are becoming so tasteless nowadays that the best touches in point of style and scholarship will be thrown away upon the many" (CL 3: 237).

His writings are designed to serve as manuals, texts, in the sense of forwarding a curriculum. As manuals, they in fact initiate a course of instruction that defines the boundaries of truth, the conditions of its accessibility,



and the mechanisms of its communication. Like Coleridge's Mariner, who, in detaining the Wedding-Guest at the "doors" to a wedding ceremony, escorts him into a fantastic world distinct from the world being enacted behind the doors of the wedding hall, Hardy's writings lead his readers into unfamiliar spaces and ways of thinking.

Ironically, everything fundamental to his sincere representation of reality seems to teach also that truth could not be regulated or distributed in this manner. Yet some regulation does exist. The problem with Hardy's notion of sincerity is that some readers are simply assumed to be incorrigible, ignorant, or warped. In fact, many of the prefaces to Hardy's novels and poems chronicle the frustration he feels knowing that such readers exist. He recognizes all too well the reader's role in confirming the credibility of what he asserts. Without the reader's recognition, without the properly educated reader, sincerity becomes what it claims to oppose--a belief, an accidental truth, mere sophistry.

Because Hardy's sincere and conscientious representation would strive to delineate a general truth, the existence of an incorrigible or unsympathetic reader would challenge the generality, and hence the reality, of this truth. No wonder Hardy inveighs against his readers for misapprehending the obvious and plain meaning of his novels.

The prefaces where his protests appear also record his denials that his novels promote a consistent theory of life. His protests and denials, like the surprise he expresses on being faced with such unprincipled readers, indicate that he thinks the standard he invokes to control the reception of his writings and the truth they profess is plain and obvious. "I believe that those readers who care for my poems at all . . . [are] readers to whom no passport is required" (CP 556). His notion of the truth could be sustained only with the help of this discrimination, since those readers who would need a "passport" were strangers to Hardy's world and therefore would be outside of its law.<sup>2</sup>

Thus Hardy formulates a totality outside of which certain readings appear unrealizable, meaningless, inappropriate, hebetate, dissolute, amusing. In taking this course, however, he would have to violate his own demand for a sincere and conscientious vision, and this, too, weakens his attitude toward established institutions and traditions.

Hardy's confrontation with these troublesome readers also puts his identity at risk. At times Hardy might object that "They know a phasm they name as me, / In whom I should not find / A single self-held quality / Of body or mind" (CP 917). But despite all his objections and denials, these "phasms" would insistently return to curse him.

Consequently, Hardy would try feverishly to assert his identity by writing his name over and over again in prefaces

and in revised editions of his texts. Hardy even once expressed a wistful desire for the opportunity to rewrite everything he had written. "Would that I could write all my books over again: I might make them worth reading" (CL 2: 32). Clearly, he is not confident that even this monumental undertaking could offer some resistance to these unsanctioned applications of his writings.

The ostensible reason for embarking on this venture of rewriting is to try to retain control over his words, to oversee the direction they would take in a reader's mind; for he knew perfectly well that what he often advertised as the plain truth, one easily visible to the most ordinary of his readers, could be more complex and difficult to reach than he led his readers to believe. Every signature required a counter signature, which (dis)confirmed the former.<sup>3</sup> With every additional signature, he confirmed the very impression his signing was attempting to eradicate: that he is not exclusively in control of his words, that their plenitude is imaginary, that their essence is not inviolable.

One of the primary reasons for Hardy to sign his name repeatedly is to keep his words from carrying him away and leaving him to ponder if he had ever owned them--if anyone had ever owned them--or if they had always been elements of controversy, of a conflict beyond anyone's control. Hardy

expresses an understanding of this problem in his "A Poet's Thought." "It went from his chamber along the city strand, / Lingered awhile, then leapt all over the land. / It came back maimed and mangled. And the poet / When he beheld his offspring did not know it: / Yea, verily, since its birth Time's tongue had tossed to him / Such travesties that his old thought was lost to him" (CP 865). Yet Hardy would retain his faith in his power to rescue words from their lawless peregrinations; he continually struggled to assert his control, without which his own identity and position in the world would deteriorate into the kind of unspecified existence that afflicts those characters in his novels bedeviled by similar circumstances, such as Cytherea Graye, Viviette Constantine, and Jude Fawley.

Hardy's quarrel with "warped" readers indicates just how questionable the neutrality and universality of his meanings could be. To the discerning minds of a conscientious observer and reader, disagreement and social divisiveness are primarily the products of misunderstandings or distractions. As a result, these conscientious observers interpret almost any instance of unassuaged disagreement as a sign of ignorance, immorality, or egoism. Hardy writes in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" that

it is unfortunately quite possible to read the most elevating works of imagination in our own or any language, and, by fixing the regard on the wrong sides of the subject, to gather not a grain of wisdom from them, nay, sometimes positive harm. What author has not had his experience of such



readers?--the mentally and morally warped ones of both sexes, who will, where practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions. Truly has it been observed that "the eye sees that which it brings with it the means of seeing." (125)

As this passage suggests, because these instances of disagreement are accidental, "unfortunately quite possible" though not avoidable, they can be rectified. In a letter to Edmund Gosse, Hardy hypothesizes that an accident has motivated critics to consider wrongly that Jude the Obscure is "a manifesto on the 'marriage question'" (CL 2: 93). "I suppose the attitude of these critics," Hardy writes, "is to be accounted for by the accident that, during the serial publication of my story, a sheaf of 'purpose' novels on the matter appeared." With an accident, one would only need to point out the right side of the subject upon which to fix one's attention. Or one could be educated. "Our true subject is a lesson in life," Hardy writes, "mental enlargement from elements essential to the narratives themselves and from the reflections they engender" ("PRF" 114). Reflection would aid one in distinguishing "truths which are temporary from truths that are eternal, the accidental from the essential, accuracies as to custom and ceremony from accuracies as to the perennial procedure of humanity" ("PRF" 118).

"Warped" readers, then, are incapable of making these distinctions, a disability which classifies them as

unreflective and uninquiring, which predisposes them to misunderstandings and distractions. For reflective readers, the meaning of these distinctions is obvious, but for "warped" readers, they are debatable. In fact, one can say that these "warped" readers do get Hardy's meaning; they at least hit upon the right subject, though they only see the wrong side of the subject, as if to say they were looking at it through the wrong lens. According to Hardy, "warped" readers mistake an "honest" representation for an "attack." In short, in order to be read, Hardy's writings must be seen as "honest" representations and not as a series of "attacks."

Ironically, at these times, a "warped" reader more than a reflective one seems the embodiment of a penetrating and conscientious mind, since Hardy identifies the distrust of plain and obvious meanings as a trait of a penetrating mind. What these "warped" readers see is both more and less than what Hardy may want them to see. While "warped" readers see less than an obvious and plain meaning, they also see beyond Hardy's neutrality, or, more accurate, they see the political within sincerity, despite Hardy's incessant claims that sincerity is an apolitical representation of reality. The mistake that "warped" readers make is in "fixing the regard on the wrong sides of the subject." That shift in attention reveals something quite different from what Hardy intends. Hardy does not say, then, that "warped" readers

have completely overlooked the subject of his writings. Instead, their point of view reveals, perhaps, what Hardy prefers to state indirectly. In other words, sincerity does involve the question of the political, but for Hardy, the political is framed in terms of the question of providing an "honest picture." Hardy's insistence that he is providing an "honest picture of human nature" seems to mark an attempt to displace what is explicitly confrontational and political, an "attack," into the realm of psychology, "human nature," and representational integrity, "an honest picture." This displacement, then, does not mean that "warped" readers have completely misconstrued Hardy's intentions. Instead, it means that they mistakenly focus their attention on the wrong side of the subject, that rather than read Hardy's writings for what they have to say about "human nature," "warped" readers read Hardy's writings with an eye toward their political implications.

Classifying some of his readers as "warped" may have offered Hardy the occasion to reason that disagreements had a rational explanation in misunderstandings, ignorance, customs, or egoism. But Hardy's interpretation of these readers, which is an interpretation of the roots of disagreement and of the transmission of meaning, constitutes an obfuscation of discursive differences, of differences in general. What Hardy's interpretation obfuscates is the

historical or differential determination of the question of meaning.

Notice that in the following passage from "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" Hardy skirts the need to justify the effects of a sincere presentation on "weak minds." Instead, he claims, a sincere presentation justifies itself, even though he needs to assert its self-justification.

Of the effects of such sincere presentation on weak minds . . . it is not our duty to consider too closely. A novel which does moral injury to a dozen imbeciles, and has bracing results upon a thousand intellects of normal vigor, can justify its existence; and probably a novel was never written by the purest-minded author for which there could not be found some moral invalid or other whom it was capable of harming. ("PRF" 118)

On the one hand, it is perhaps hard to imagine that the same person who formulates a theory of sympathetic interpretation and claims to respect the extreme passions and unaccountable behaviors of ordinary individuals would be indifferent to the plight of these wretched figures. On the other, Hardy does express a begrudging tolerance for unsophisticated individuals; often, however, this tolerance resembles more a patronizing understanding of their eccentricities and convictions than a sincere appreciation. Consider, for instance, how this passage assigns values, especially the values of purity and normality. In addition, statements like "it is not our duty to consider too closely" and a sincere presentation "can justify its existence" seem



to argue that the grounds of a sincere presentation are indisputable. Any discussion on what this sincere presentation offers then appears superfluous.

If Hardy were to consider the effects of a sincere presentation on "weak minds," however, several alarming conclusions would be brought out. For one, the assumption that the meaning handed down in a sincere presentation is inevitably continuous, universally convincing in itself, would be challenged. One could show that any continuity of meaning is only guaranteed by an authority external to the subject of a sincere presentation. That is, by some value that is not intrinsic to the presentation itself, or even to language. Without such an external authority, Hardy finds that he could not read himself; or he could turn the meaning of his writings against themselves.

One of the functions of a reflective and inquiring reader is to prevent the dissemination of meaning. By virtue of his authority as a privileged reader, a reflective and inquiring reader renders harmless what can transform an inquiring reader into a weak minded or imbecilic reader. Notice the imperative tone of the following passage. It underscores the fact that the continuity of meaning Hardy takes for granted in "The Profitability of Reading Fiction," that he regards as plain or obvious or inevitably self-justifying, depends on some form of authority to make it convincing. "But we must not, as inquiring readers, fail to

understand that attention to accessories has its virtues when the nature of its regard does not involve blindness to higher things; still more when it conduces to the elucidation of higher things" (119). It is strange that an inquiring reader needs to be reminded of what to do. In reminding an inquiring reader what he or she should not forget, Hardy seems to be suggesting that the meaning he asserts to be obvious is not independently convincing. Hence, it can always be potentially absconded. Even an inquiring or reflective reader needs a guide; therefore, even this privileged reader can lose sight of Hardy's obvious and higher meaning.

Why an inquiring reader should require a guide is strange, since an inquiring reader is also a penetrating reader, someone who, unlike a weak-minded reader, already possesses the ability to discriminate between the common-place and the uncommon. The ability to discriminate between what is common-place and what is uncommon is precisely what the guide, along with the penetrating reader, possesses and what the guide is supposed to instill in those readers that cannot see beyond what is common-place. If a sincere presentation justifies itself, if its meaning is allegedly plain, obvious, or inevitable, why would an inquiring, penetrating, and reflective reader require a guide? That this privileged reader of "normal vigor" requires a guide may say something more than Hardy would want to admit: even

for a reflective reader, an obvious and plain meaning is not inevitably convincing in itself.

In addition, by considering the effect of a sincere presentation upon "weak minds," Hardy might have had to confront the more general possibility that his meaning could drift from its intended course, from its intended receiver, or from its intended expression. For Derrida, this drift constitutes what he calls the "iterability" of any mark.

The possibility of repeating and thus of identifying the marks is implicit in every code, making it into a network that is communicable, transmittable, decipherable, iterable for a third, and hence for every possible user in general. To be what it is, all writing must, therefore, be capable of functioning in the absence of every empirically determined receiver in general. ("SEC" 8).

A letter to Florence Henniker suggests that Hardy might have been attune to this possibility of drifting. Jude the Obscure, Hardy states,

is really addressed to those into whose souls the iron of adversity has deeply entered at some time of their lives, and can hardly be congenial to self-indulgent persons of ease and affluence. Indeed, there is something bizarre in the tragedy of "Jude" coming out as the last fashionable novel. But one cannot choose one's readers. (CL 2: 94-95).

For Hardy, the meaning he refers to in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" and throughout his novels appears plain, obvious, or inevitable (given one knows how to look for it). This meaning appears as the presumed end, or historical outcome, of experience. In either form, however, it meets with little valid opposition because it is

assuredly inevitable and neutral. Opposition to this meaning is invalid, not worth considering too closely, because being opposed to it means that one is ignorant, distracted, or blind. Yet when Hardy encounters a "warped" reader, his assumption that the meaning of a sincere representation is obvious and self-justifying loses its grounding.

In a passage previously cited, Hardy states that a deviant reading of his intended meaning is an unfortunate possibility, but one which can be easily rectified because it involves accidentally fixing one's attention on the wrong sides of a subject. His quarrelsome encounter with "warped" readers, however, can also show that this unfortunate possibility is much more intractable than he leads one to believe. Far from being accidental, it can also be a constitutive aspect of the transmission of meaning. This unfortunate possibility makes meaning both possible and impossible, inevitable and fortuitous, which is what Cytherea Graye realizes as she nervously wonders whether her intended meaning will be received even after she labors to express herself in the most unambiguous way. "Though conscious of her success in producing the kind of word she had wished to produce, [Cytherea Graye] at the same time trembled in suspense as to how it would be taken" (DR 81).



Recall as well that Hardy describes himself as a "guide." In "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Hardy revives the metaphor of the "guide."

In pursuance of his quest for a true exhibition of man, the reader will naturally consider whether he feels himself under the guidance of a mind who sees further into life than he himself has seen; or, at least, who can throw a stronger irradiation over subjects already within his ken than he has been able to do unaided. (115)

This description implies that Hardy's readers in general are in a precarious relationship with regard to the transmission of meaning. Because they require a guide to lead them through Hardy's fictional world, all readers are potential wanderers. At any moment they can lose their way and thus lose sight of Hardy's obvious meaning. The meaning of Hardy's fiction can always be potentially lost to them; however, these circumstances also allow Hardy's meaning to be received, though only by a reflective and inquiring reader. This meaning specifically escapes the understanding of "weak minds," "imbeciles," and "moral invalid[s]." But Hardy's disapproval of the public "exchange" of meaning demonstrates that the potential for the dissemination of meaning is more pervasive. In short, the dissemination of meaning is not reducible to a specific subject--"imbeciles," "weak minds," or "moral invalid[s]." Paradoxically, a reflective and perspicacious reader might occasionally have to relax his or her dependence on a guide in striving after an obvious meaning, which Hardy argues one cannot do.

The appreciative, perspicacious reader will see what his author is aiming at, and by affording full scope to his own insight, catch the vision which the writer has in his eye, and is endeavoring to project upon the paper, even while it half eludes him. ("PRF" 116-117)

What the author is "aiming at" is not, however, the thing itself. For that matter, how is one to measure the extent to which an author's "half elude[d]" vision reaches what it is "aiming at," or to what extent it obscures the vision for the author and the reader, the reader who only has a diminished vision to guide him?

Ironically, although the reflective reader has trouble seeing certain subjects on his or her own, s/he can readily identify a supposed guide. If the guide functions as an index of an irradiated subject that is to come, an index of the message to come, so to speak, identifying the guide is something like already seeing what is to come before its time. In other words, the guide is part of the message, an index of the irradiated subject, rather than an element separate from the message. Hardy, however, wants to separate the message from the guide when they cannot be. If the message cannot be separated from its guide, the readers that recognize their guide already identify with the guide and with what the guide signifies, a "stronger irradiation over subjects." As a result, the reader that can recognize its guide, and in doing so identify with the guide, never risks losing its sight or its connection to an obvious and plain meaning. Thus, Hardy's meaning would never seem to

drift from its course. Hardy's meaning, or his message, will always appear to arrive, will always be confirmed, will always be returned to its intended expression and to its author. This meaning is brought "thoroughly home." At least this is what Hardy tries to accomplish and what his encounter with "warped" readers frustrates.

In addition to questioning the authority and clarity of Hardy's plain and obvious meaning, "warped" readers expose the limits of Hardy's theory of a sympathetic interpretation, which Hardy describes as a "sympathetic appreciativeness of life in all of its manifestations" ("SF" 137). Because this encounter may threaten Hardy's theory of sympathetic interpretation, how he accounts for these readers is important. For instance, Hardy will do more than dispute their distorted interpretation of his plain meaning. Hardy will regard "warped" readers as being incomprehensible; their reactions to his sincere representation are beyond belief, stupefying. The claims of these readers defy comprehension. Unlike the unfamiliar spheres of reality that Hardy encourages his readers to appreciate, these readers represent an aspect of reality that is radically different, a reality that cannot be apprehended. To embrace them would mean that Hardy's plain and obvious meaning could be debated, that disagreement could not be eradicated from the question of meaning, representation, and language. Each of these readers, then,

is an excrescence, a negation, something extra-ordinary. By not acceding to Hardy's guidance, they can never be included within Hardy's vision of a sympathetic community, within the realm of what is ordinary or normal, except as reference points for what is abnormal, immoral, and weak.

In "The Profitable Reading of Fiction," Hardy writes, "[i]f endowed with ordinary intelligence, the reader can discern, in delineative art professing to be natural, any stroke greatly at variance with nature, which, in the form of moral essay, pensee, or epigram, may be so wrapped up as to escape him" (114). In another passage, one already cited, Hardy adds that a "sincere presentation . . . has bracing effects upon a thousand intellects of normal vigor" (118). A "warped" reader possesses none of these traits, neither "ordinary intelligence" or "normal vigor." In both instances, what is plain to normal or ordinary beings escapes the "weak minds" of "warped" readers.

Reading "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" one discovers that every trait Hardy defines as ordinary coincides with the various skills he attributes to a reflective and perspicacious reader. Moreover, while Hardy will often refer to a perspicacious or reflective reader, and often to an unspecified reader (the "reader"), sometimes it is difficult to distinguish one from the other. What Hardy attributes to "the reader" could very easily be a trait of a perspicacious, inquiring, or appreciative reader,



and vice versa. Although this convergence may be purely accidental, it also seems warranted. By associating the activities of these two readers, Hardy transforms the special skills and activities of the perspicacious and reflective reader into the rudimentary activities of the general reader. Hence, the skills that a reflective reader possesses do not appear exceptional and hence do not distinguish him or her from the common reader. Once the reflective reader has been stripped of any exceptional quality, and turned almost into a figure of banality, the errors that "warped" readers commit begin to look more inexplicable, abnormal, or unwarranted. Thus, more than the "warped" reader's ability to read is under fire. His or her very character is being deprecated, since no special training is supposedly necessary to grasp Hardy's plain and obvious meaning. As Hardy writes, "mentally and morally warped [readers], who, where practicable, so twist plain and obvious meanings as to see in an honest picture of human nature an attack on religion, morals, or institutions" ("PRF" 125 emphasis added).

Consequently, such readers provoke in Hardy a feeling of wonder. According to the Life, for instance, when Tess of the d'Urbervilles was published, "an endeavor was made by some critics to change it to scandalous notoriety--the latter kind of clamour, raised by a certain small section of the public and the press, being quite inexplicable to the

writer himself" (243). As I have suggested, Hardy's stupefaction is not insignificant. The moment that Hardy sympathizes with this clamorous bunch, the moment that he acknowledges their contravening reading of his writings, Hardy's own plain and obvious meaning becomes unconvincing, disputable. The fact that Hardy does not acknowledge them, or acknowledges them in order to repudiate them, demonstrates the limits of his notion of a sincere representation of reality.

"Warped" readers force Hardy to demonstrate and defend these plain and obvious meanings. Hardy's meanings are then no longer self-justifying, and "warped" readers are no longer deluded and immoral beings that require Hardy's guidance to turn their meaningless observations into valid ones.

In some ways, the "warped" reader's habit of distorting meanings resembles the distortions of any reader that reads for pleasure. The person who reads for amusement exercises "a generous imaginativeness, which shall find in a tale not only all that was put there by the author, but he it never so awkwardly, but which shall find there what was never inserted by him, never foreseen, never contemplated" ("PRF" 112). The "aim should be contrast" (112); the "town man finds what he seeks in novels of the country, the countryman in novels of society" and so on (111). However, Hardy adds, "Directly the circumstances begin to resemble those of the

reader, a personal connection, an interest other than an imaginative one, is set up, which results in an intellectual stir" ("PRF" 112). Unlike the person who reads for pleasure, the reflective reader reads for intellectual and moral profit. This "intellectual stir" enables a reflective reader to distinguish between accidental and eternal truths, custom and "the perennial procedure of humanity, which is of vital importance in our attempts to read for something more than amusement" ("PRF" 118). Because of its temperament and its faith in an author's guidance, the reflective reader is the only sort of reader that can be entrusted with the important work of distinguishing between accidental and eternal truths.

Although the person who reads for amusement does not seek intellectual or moral profit, does not distinguish between accidental and essential truths, and finds in an author's work "what was never inserted . . . never contemplated," he or she is not intolerable to Hardy. Unlike the "warped" reader, the person who reads for amusement does not challenge Hardy's representations, even though he or she will find "what was never inserted . . . never contemplated," because they read to entertain themselves and not to dwell on serious and meaningful subjects. The "warped" reader, like the person who reads for amusement, also seems to find "what was never inserted . . . never contemplated." But unlike the person who reads

for amusement, the "warped" reader is not tolerated. Why so? The "warped" reader is an immoral reader precisely because it distorts and twists Hardy's plain and obvious meanings "by fixing the regard on the wrong sides of the subject." Unlike the reader who reads for amusement, it seems that the "warped" reader does dwell on serious and meaningful subjects, that the "warped" reader does not read to exercise its imagination but to question the distinction between an accidental and eternal truth, to question the very movement toward the eternal. So while Hardy wants to dismiss the conclusions of a "warped" reader, his anxiety over what they do say indicates that they are nothing like the sort of people who read for pleasure--"warped" readers are intolerable. They are intolerable because they read Hardy both correctly and incorrectly; therefore, they cannot be dismissed, but they must be dismissed. Hence, a "warped" reader's discoveries endanger Hardy's conception of a permanent and essential truth, not by opposing it to some other essential truth but by showing how this supposed eternal or permanent truth is itself uncertain. This truth is many things at once, according to where one fixes his or her regard. "Warped" readers, then, dispossess Hardy of his words and his truth.

#### Notes

1. "A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other



words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman" (L 252). It is interesting that Hardy does not comment on the authoritarian aspect of Coleridge's tale.

2. In other words, Hardy's stamp would be the stamp of approval, resolving the question that Desperate Remedies raises on the issue of a troubling postal policy. "'Nobody's head to put on your letters,'" a postman states, "'and then your honest man who do pay his penny will never be known from your scamp who don't'" (339).

3. On the question of the signature, see Jacques Derrida's Signsponge, especially pages 130-138, and The Ear of the Other, especially pages 41-89.

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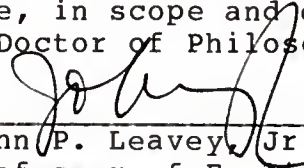


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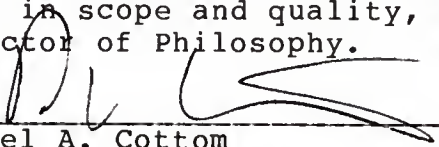
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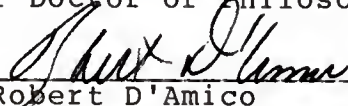
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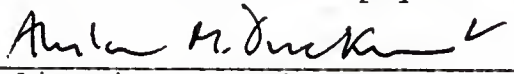
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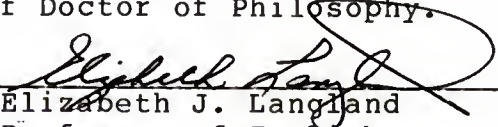
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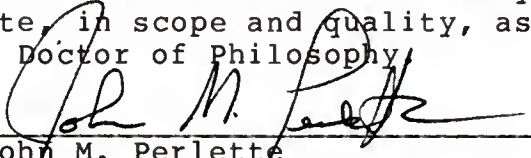
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